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The Night-Hawks of St. Louis;

Or, Dare-Devil Dan's Revenge.

By A. P. MORRIS, Jr.,
AUTHOR OF "THE CIPHER DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.



"IT IS BOLTED," AND HE GAVE TWO LOW, SIGNALING RAPS ON THE PANEL.

The Night-Hawks of St. Louis;

OR,

DARE-DEVIL DAN'S REVENGE.

BY A. P. MORRIS, JR.,

AUTHOR OF "THE RED SCORPION," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE HIDDEN JEWEL.

"Nor thankless glooms obtrude, nor cares annoy,
Whilst the sweet theme is universal joy."

—BLOOMFIELD.

"'Tis well to wake the theme of love
When chords of wild ecstatic fire
Fling from the harp, and ample prove
The soul as joyous as the lyre."

—COOK.

A SMOOTH road wound amid the trees—a highway noisy with the constant rumble of farmers' wagons, bearing their truck to the distant market.

Beyond the echoing hum that rises from the thoroughfares of a prosperous city, a narrow lane diverged from this main road—entering a dense avenue of foliage, where cool airs and pleasant perfumes broke the drowsy influence of the warm spring day.

Following the lane we bring the reader's imagination to a cottage nestled amid a picture of green and flowers—a home that was humble, though rich in the love that lived beneath its roof.

It was a posied paradise, where odors of bloom, and fairest of dreams wove their charms, in nameless number, within the senses of the beholder.

The hour was eight o'clock, A. M.

A gray-haired man sat on a low bench near the vine-clad porch; and at his feet, with one arm resting on his knee, was a beautiful girl. She was busy making up a bouquet of roses culled from the beds that surrounded the cottage, and singing lowly to herself at the same time.

Nineteen years of age; not yet perfect in her loveliness—but more than merely pretty, and promising to be a woman of rare symmetry. Eyes of hazel; lips of sweets; cheeks of blush; hair almost black and curly; a voice of merriment and soberness alternately—this was Zella Kearn, to an observer, the gem that was hidden away from the world, in the snug little cottage by the country lane.

The man was her father, Wilbur Kearn; and these two alone, were the occupants of the fairy retreat.

He sat there with his head bent forward, his eyes looking far out through an opening in the trees, resting vacantly on the scene before him, while his mind was divided between absorbing thoughts and a listless attention to the song of his child.

Suddenly the music of her voice ceased.

"There!—I've finished it. Look, pa; isn't it pretty?"

She held up the result of her labors for his inspection, as she spoke. But turning to glance into his face, the exclamation died abruptly, and the gay smile fled.

Wilbur Kearn did not hear her. And a long silence ensued, while she studied the aged features unwaveringly.

At last she rose, and wound an arm around his neck.

"Pa?"

"Eh?—did you speak to me, child?"

Instantly the smile came back.

"Yes, I did. You didn't seem to hear me. Look: isn't this pretty? What's the matter, pa? You are pale. Are you sick?"

"I've not been well for several days, Zella. I—I was thinking when you spoke to me."

"Thinking? What about?" rapidly, and twitching the bouquet as she gave it some final touches of improvement.

"Oh, nothing."

Zella laughed. "It can't be of much importance, if it's nothing; but I want to know."

"Do not insist."

"Well, I sha'n't, then," pouting.

"I'm going to town to-day, Zella," he added.

"Are you? Take me!—I want to go, so bad. I've lots of things to get, pa."

"No, Zella, not this time—the next. Wait till I go again—"

"Oh, pshaw! I do think I'm the most unfortunate girl in the world! Why, I haven't been to town for a whole month. I want to see Aunt Jane, too. What do you keep me buried up in this way for? You must be afraid you'll lose me! And it's a shame, for I—"

"Tut, tut, Zella, not so fast," he interrupted, as she rattled off the sentences.

"Well, what's the reason, then? I'm worse off than a bird in a cage, and I don't like it a bit."

"We have been very happy here, Zella."

"Yes, pa, I know we have," and her tone softened; "but you act just as if you were afraid of losing me—you guard me so close."

A momentary glance darted at her from his gray eyes; a peculiar expression passed over his face.

But Zella did not notice it. She was still fingering at the bouquet, as if it would not look to please her; the roses were receiving all the benefit of her gaze; what she said was half-playful, half in earnest.

"It is for your own good, child," and with the speech, Kearn arose and entered the house to prepare for his departure.

A few steps inside the hallway, he paused and looked back, though he could not see her from where he stood.

"Yes," he uttered, in a low, reflective voice; "I am afraid of losing you. One so beautiful as you, my child, durst not be too well-known—particularly if they have a heart like yours. And, though your nature is difficult to read, there *might* chance some one to penetrate it; and it would do you no good—it would do you no good."

His only child was precious to him, and he did guard her jealously.

When alone, Zella moved toward a bowered seat at one side of the grassy plot.

Suddenly, a half-smothered exclamation escaped her. She had seen a figure approaching along the path that led from the lane to the house—one that she recognized—and, in a second, she changed the direction of her steps.

But she did not wish to elude the comer; for, while he drew near, she knelt at a rose-bush—though it really needed not another bud to complete the bouquet.

A young man emerged from the shade of the graveled path—then halted to contemplate her; for the picture seemed to him like the apparition of a floral nymph.

Then he advanced and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Ough!—Mr. Winfield!" There was a recoil accompanying the simulation of surprise; but, in the same breath, she continued, as she sprang to her feet:

"You must be trying to frighten me to death! Why did you come up so stealthily? See my pretty flowers—do you want them?"

"I am wild to possess them, since they were arranged by *your* hands—"

"Oh, don't go wild!" with a rippling, merry laugh. "Here—I gathered them for you."

"For me?"

"Didn't I say so? Come, let us go up to the house. Pa is going to the city. So, consider yourself my prisoner till he gets back," and she wheeled about and started toward the porch.

"I would esteem it a great favor if you held me in captivity forever."

"You might get tired!" laughingly.

"No danger. I always feel so happy in your society, that I look forward with eagerness to each visit I intend making you."

"Do you? I am glad to hear it. Sit down. You haven't been to see us in two weeks—"

"It has not been for lack of desire, I assure you—"

"Are you going now pa?" to her father, who just then came out.

"Yes—ah! you have company. Hope you are well to-day, Mr. Winfield."

The two men exchanged cordial salutations, and, after a few remarks of no particular import, Kearn started off.

For a long time, Winfield sat conversing with the merry girl—she doing most of the talking. It was a pleasure to be silent and listen to her endless utterances; though he

wondered how she could find so much to employ the tongue, for she mingled very little with the outside world, nor was she fond of reading. Her powers seemed to be a natural gift.

"You talk so fast, I can hardly catch your words," he interrupted, as she poured out a multitude of sentences that all ran together, with hardly space for punctuation.

"Ha! ha! ha! do I? Then you must listen fast."

"When will you be a sober woman, Zella?"

"I'm sure I don't know—never, I guess. I think I'll always be a girl;" and again the red lips laughed aloud.

"I prophesy that you will never marry, unless you cease to be a girl."

"Oh, my! How unkind. Ha! ha! ha! but I guess you are right. To tell the truth, I know I shall never marry any one."

"You won't?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Oh, well—because," with the laugh again.

"Then I never shall."

"You won't? Why?" and she looked at him keenly.

He had spoken without thought.

"I can hardly answer that," he said. "Perhaps it is for the same reason you have given: 'because.'"

Hugh Winfield was a young man of about twenty-four years; a blonde; and by nature sincere—though not entirely free from selfishness. At the time our narrative begins, he was studying law.

His acquaintance with Wilbur Kearn and Zella was not of long standing; yet in the few months that had elapsed since their first meeting, he had experienced a peculiar admiration of her—not exactly love and still, a feeling very similar.

His visits to the cottage were not frequent, but they were periodical; and each time he bade Zella good-by, to return to his mental labors in the city, he felt an increase of the fascination that had crept upon him.

On this day he remained with her until the sun was low in the west. Ere he parted, and while he held her hand, he said:

"Zella, before I go, I want a kiss—"

"Mr. Winfield!" She drew back, and the dark eyes widened.

But he held her tightly.

"Come, Zella—just one."

"No, Mr. Winfield—no!"

"Yes!" while he drew the resisting form closer.

"No! no! no!"

But the kiss was won, though she shrunk from him, trembling.

He did not dream, then, what that kiss was to cost.

As he walked away along the lane, he was thinking deeply.

"Do I love this girl?" he asked himself, more than once. "What makes me feel thus toward her? Not a word, not a look has ever been given, to tell me that she loves me—yet she is drawing my heart irresistibly toward her, until I am almost ready to fall on my knees before her! I would have her with me always; but it seems as if I dare not ask her to be mine. There are other women far better educated than she—women, too, whose bosoms are passionate with love, while Zella is cold, either by force or will, or actual deadness to the keener emotions of the heart. A merry, careless girl. I love, and do not love. Where is a name for such a state?"

At a sort of tavern, or restaurant, about a mile from Kearn's dwelling, Winfield had stalled his horse; and, soon procuring the animal, he rode off, still thinking of Zella, and his own indefinable condition of mind.

Zella had gazed after his retreating form till the trees screened him from sight. Her face—merry, smiling and unreadable all the afternoon—now was very solemn, and the hazel eyes were softer than usual in their gaze, as they followed after Hugh Winfield. But, when the young man disappeared, there was a toss of the head, which threw the curls over her shoulders, and she stepped upon the porch, pausing here to look once more down the path, as if expecting to catch another glimpse of him; and then entered the house to set the table for the evening meal.

"I think he might have waited for tea, anyhow!" she exclaimed, as her deft hands spread the snowy cloth.

CHAPTER II.

SHALL HE DO IT?

"For I have wandered far and felt the might
Of southern loveliness and northern wit,
But every charm at length has taken flight,
And at a vision's feet again I sit."

—TUCKERMAN.

"One face was ever in my sight.
One voice was ever in my ear."

—LONDON.

NIGHT was closing fast on St. Louis.

In the immediate neighborhood of Lucas Place, stood the commodious residence of Cyrus Winfield, a merchant of considerable wealth and high standing in the community.

The father of Hugh Winfield sat in his luxurious parlor, in dressing-gown and slippers, enjoying his usual rest after a day of activity in the business walks of life; and Mrs. Winfield, a mild, low-voiced, meek-looking lady, was occupied with meditation, for her eyes rested steadfastly on the carpet, and a thoughtful expression dwelt in her face.

The two were alone.

Cyrus was a man of fifty odd years, strongly built, and of rather stern-cast countenance. His eyes could flash and his voice growl—or, he could be gentle as a child; so said, at least, those who knew him most intimately.

Hugh was the only living child of the pair; death had darkened his house thrice in a few short years.

Neither had spoken for a long space; and he was regarding his wife with an unturning gaze.

"Anna—you must stop this thinking."

She started and glanced up.

"It will only harass your mind," he added, "and can accrue no benefit. Now, stop it, I say."

"I can not help it, Cyrus," said the mild voice, and the tones of the speaker were sad.

"But you must help it. What good will it do?"

"Perhaps none; but, Cyrus, I know that Hugh will never consent to this plan—it will touch too keenly on his pride. Consider; he is our only son, if he makes the sacrifice, it will result in much unhappiness to him. How can I be otherwise than miserable, when I foresee so much trouble in the future?"

"You forget the trouble of the present."

"No, I do not, Cyrus; thoughts on both those subjects are torturing me."

"You say you know that Hugh will not consent? How do you know?"

"I have already told you: his pride. This girl is not the proper mate for him—you know she is not, Cyrus."

"Pah!"

"He cannot love her—"

"Pah, again! Love?—it's all nonsense. There's money in the match; and we must have money."

"Money will not insure happiness in marriage."

"It ought to. Marriage without money is foolishness—it is downright nonsense—"

"You did not think that way when we married, Cyrus," she interrupted, reprovingly.

"True, Anna—true. But the 'situation' is the thing now; we must have money, or the ship will sink."

"And would you sacrifice the soul of one of that ship's crew, in order to save your own life?"

He bit his nether lip and moved nervously.

"Let us quit this. Necessity is a trying state—ah!" He paused as a footstep sounded in the hall.

In another moment, Hugh Winfield entered.

Mrs. Winfield withdrew.

"Ah, Hugh!"

"Well, father?"

"You've just come in?"

"Yes. I was going up-stairs, but a servant told me that you wished to see me."

"So I do—so I do. Sit down. I want

to talk with you. You went out on horse-back this morning."

"I paid a visit to Mr. Kearns," drawing up a chair before his father, and seating himself.

Winfield frowned slightly; but his brow cleared in a second.

"You go there pretty often of late, it seems to me. Take care, Hugh, take care; I have seen Zella Kearns and she is just the girl to trap the affections of a young man."

"Trap, father!" and he flushed at the word.

"Pah! it's all nonsense. Keep away from her. I've another rose for you to cull."

Hugh looked at him keenly.

"Speak on, father; what is it you have to say?"

After a brief silence, Cyrus Winfield gazed full in his son's face, and said, while he delivered each word in a measured accent:

"Hugh, I am on the verge of total ruin."

"What!"

The exclamation was one of amazement.

Cyrus repeated.

"What do you mean? Explain!" cried Hugh.

"I mean just what I say. My last available funds were drawn to-day. My real estate is tied up so that it is worth nothing to me. Business has failed me; money has slipped through my fingers, as if each dollar was an eel! Cyrus Winfield, to-day, this minute, is not worth ten thousand dollars."

"And to what does this prelude tend?" asked the young man, while he stared, for he saw that there was something behind his father's significant speeches.

"You can save me."

"I!"

"Yes. If you will be the son to me, now, that you have been in the past, I shall survive the storm—if you will not, then our family will sink from its place in society, and the name of Winfield, so proud, so exalted, will sputter out like a wetted candle."

"Be plain, father; I don't understand you."

"You have heard of Ilde Wyn?"

"I have," with an increase of the wonder that was painted in his face.

"You know that she is worth half a million?"

"I do," promptly. "And the questions are: Who is this Ilde Wyn? Where and how did she acquire her wealth?"

"No matter about that—she has it. Money is money, without regard to its possessor."

"Still I do not understand what you are aiming at."

Cyrus shifted his position uneasily.

"I made bold to call upon this young lady, yesterday—"

"Father—!"

"Hold, now. I know that neither her money nor her beauty have sufficed to obtain for her the *entree* to our better circles; and this is simply because it has been rumored that she is nobody's child—that she was seen, ten years ago, begging on the streets. True—if the last rumor be correct—she gained her wealth with questionable suddenness. But, you must remember, this is all rumor—*only* rumor. I say I have seen her. She received me politely. She is an affable, intelligent girl, full of life and vigor; and—and, Hugh, from inferences drawn while in her company, I am candid when I declare that I believe she is a victim to foul slander and unmerited abuse. Moreover, I think she will make a reasonably good wife—"

"Father!—father!" and the quick-breathed exclamations appeared to come chokingly, "you want me to marry her?"

"Yes—that's it."

"Never!"

"Hugh!"

Cyrus Winfield frowned and his eyes kindled.

"Father, I cannot!"

"But think for a moment of the alternative—loss of all that is dear to us, deprivation of those associations that have become so necessary to our existence."

"There is no gain in the remedy," protested Hugh. "We will be barred from society the same, if she becomes a member of our family."

"Not at all. With the money this match will bring us we can leave St. Louis and begin life anew. I tell you"—and he closed his teeth forcibly—"the last available funds I possess are this moment in the large desk in my office-library. When this is spent I do not know how we shall live. Will you save me?"

"This is terrible—terrible!"

Hugh Winfield started from his chair and paced excitedly to and fro.

Cyrus watched the changeable workings of his features as if to read what would be the reply. And the light in his eyes was stern and eager by turns, for his inward senses were fluctuating between hope and despair.

"You speak as though I had but to ask to get her," said the young man questioningly as he paused short in his walk up and down.

"And I do not speak idly. She has had opportunity for sight of you when you did not know it; she has listened to many of your conversations when you would not have dreamed she was near—"

"Then she must be a witch!"

"I did not ask her to explain the 'hows.' I have ascertained that she loves you."

"Loves me!"

"She told me as much."

"Ilde Wyn is not very maidenly. She must have been *exceedingly* entertaining that such an intimacy should exist in so short a time between you and her."

And the comments were tinged with a sneer.

"We can overlook that. Come, Hugh, be just to us all—avert the blow that is imminent. Win this lovely girl, and get hold of her purse-strings! Will you do it?"

"I will not answer you now."

With the blunt reply that came even huskily from his lips, Hugh Winfield strode from the parlor.

The old gentleman gazed after him; and when the last echoes of his step had died out in the entry above, Cyrus muttered to himself: "He is a strong-willed boy. Now, both he and his mother, I feel, think I am anxious for the consummation of this marriage, for reasons beyond the perils from my debts. It is not so. Ilde Wyn is not the one for him; I would not have him wed her if she was the only woman in the world. But, money!—money! I must have money! And if he refuse me this aid, he shall repent!"

As he finished his mutterings, his eyes sparkled and his brow knit scowlingly.

A veranda opened, at the further side of the parlor, into a well-cultivated garden. About the veranda were arranged a number of plants—some of them of dense growth, as well as gaudy bloom. And amid the screening foliage a pair of eyes were watching Cyrus Winfield as he stood there, musing aloud, and unconscious of the surveillance.

Hugh went straightway to his room, and threw himself into a chair by the window, where he sat gazing vacantly up at the starlit sky, and pondering on what had been proposed to him.

Never were his thoughts so full of Zella Kearns as now. Try all he would, he could not escape the imaginary presence of her dark, laughing eyes—and her merry voice seemed ringing unceasingly in his ears.

How could he play the hypocrite, and utter a tale of love for Ilde Wyn? Yet, could he see that father, who had so tenderly guarded him from the cradle to manhood, sink to ruin, when his salvation lay in a single act of a dutiful son?

The air was very close. Hardly a breath stirred on that side of the house. He left his bedchamber, and sought the office library, where a cool breeze rustled the curtains at the long, antique-looking windows.

The apartment was dark and spectral; only the dim light of the stars struggled to break the shadows about him.

He drew an ottoman to one of the windows, and, seating himself there, gazed dreamily out upon the garden.

An unbroken stillness prevailed in his surrounding; soon he was oblivious to all

else but his reveries on the entanglements of the hour.

The minutes multiplied; the night advanced, unheeded by the solitary occupant of the library.

Suddenly, a figure glided across his vision—this one quickly followed by another. Two forms had scaled the garden wall, and were moving stealthily toward the house.

Half-aroused, yet not entirely free from the listless spell that held him, he strained his eyes to watch the apparitions, though he sat silent and immovable.

And, at that moment:

Toll!—toll!—toll!—began to strike a near clock—the hour of eleven.

Time had, indeed, passed rapidly, since the dreamer came there.

CHAPTER III.

BEGGAR AND MASTER.

"Oh that torment should not be confined,
To the body's wounds and sores,
With maladies innumerable
In head, heart, breast and reins;
But must secret passage find
To the inmost mind."

—MILTON.

"Ah, me! alas, pain, pain ever, forever."

—SHELLEY.

WILBUR KEARN, after leaving his horse, stepped briskly along the road in the direction of the city, St. Louis.

As he passed the roadside "Relay," where Hugh Winfield had stalled his horse, the proprietor, and one or two loiterers, who were gathered in conversation on the porch, greeted him with a friendly nod.

He was well known thereabouts as a man of education—one who, rumor said, had once been well situated in the world's comforts; and many wondered why he had sought so deserted a place to live in, when it was evident that his proper sphere lay in the heart of an active mercantile community.

But, gossip and inquiry had failed to set forth anything definite regarding him; and the voluntary hermit of the cottage retreat was, therefore, a mystery in the neighborhood.

He walked a goodly distance—finally entering an omnibus that brought him to the Fifth street line of cars. Taking a car, he proceeded into the busy thoroughfares.

When next we see him, he is near the corner of Biddle and — streets, standing before a dusty-looking, gloomy-fronted dwelling, a portion of which was devoted to a confectionery shop of uninviting dinginess.

Over a side door, which gave ingress to the upper stories of the building, a transom contained, in letters of faded gilt, the sign:

DR. ONNORRANN.

Kearn paused for a few moments, and looked up at the lettered transom. His face was pale, and an involuntary frown wrinkled on his forehead. But the frown disappeared almost instantly, and, instead, there followed an expression of pain and sadness; while his gaze fell, and he bowed his head as a man will who is suddenly burdened with woeful thoughts.

He quickly roused himself, however, and advanced to the door.

Entering a narrow, damp-aired passageway, he continued up a flight of stairs that were dimly-lighted by a half-closed window at their head.

To the right of the first landing was a door, and on this door Kearn knocked sharply.

"C-o-m-e," drawled a sleepy voice on the inside.

The visitor entered.

The apartment was high-ceilinged and square; book-cases, filled with medical volumes, were arranged along the whole of one side; two broad windows, without curtains, admitted an unpleasant glare of sunlight; on the floor was a dirty matting; a few chairs, with worn seats, and a dirty sofa, stood carelessly prominent. In one corner was a round table, containing decanter and wine-glasses; on the walls, in profuse number, were drawings of arms, limbs, hands, feet, lungs, hearts, skeletons, and other anatomical diagrams. From an immense chandelier

hung a wire, and on the wire was suspended a grinning skull, that turned slowly round and round.

A large desk, in the center of the room, was piled with books and numerous cases of surgical instruments; and at the desk sat Theophilus Onnorann, M. D., whose office we have endeavored to describe.

He was rather tall, rather slim—his legs almost fleshless, his arms long and thin in proportion to his body. His head was small—with a sparse growth of red hair, a receding forehead, long ears, sunken eyes, hollow cheeks, pointed chin, hooked nose; and over the latter he wore a pair of green spectacles.

At sight of the comer he dropped the book he had been reading, and slipped, eel-like, from his seat.

"Ah! friend Kearn—you? Come in. I am delighted. You haven't called to see me for some time. Unusual. How do you do?"

His voice was affable; he smiled blandly.

"I suppose you are delighted to see me," said Kearn, with a slight bitterness, as he accepted the chair that was pushed toward him.

"Of course I am," went on Onnorann; adding, significantly: "though I knew you'd come again. I've been expecting you, every day, for a week—you manage to come periodically, you know. I was just reading a treatise on Iodoform. It's a good joke! one hundred pills for stomach neuralgia! Kill or cure, or both—I—" He ceased, and looked into the face of his visitor, who, he saw was regarding him steadily; and Kearn was frowning as he had frowned before entering the house.

The father of Zella Kearn was there for no idle purpose. His eyes bent keenly on the man of medicine, and Onnorann was not at ease under the gaze, for he whisked himself over to the wine-table and brought it forward to a position between them.

"Take some wine, friend Kearn. It's fine old stuff—good, I warrant. Try it," settling himself comfortably, pouring two glasses full, and beginning to sip the beverage with a marked appreciation.

But Kearn declined.

"Doctor Onnorann, you know what I am here for."

The eyes behind the spectacles looked at him in a peculiar way; then they fell again to the glass, and their owner said, carelessly:

"Well, yes, I believe I do. It's the same old begging story, eh?"

"Will you never relent?"

"Relent?"

He raised his glass to the light and smiled unreadably as he surveyed its sparkling contents.

"You have tortured me long enough," continued Kearn. "Tell me now what I want to know. Where—where is my child? Surely, your hate must be satiated by this time."

The wine-glass descended slowly to the table, the physician's eyes fixed piercingly on him.

"Wilbur Kearn," said the low voice, in a tone of strange seriousness, "you know the conditions upon which I will be merciful. You know—for I have told you plainly—that only on these conditions will I do it. I have sworn to it. You have sworn to me now at regular intervals, year after year, with the same begging, begging, begging. I tell you, sir, it is useless. Do as I dictate, or you will die without learning my secret. My secret?—ha! ha! ha! I forget. I do not know it myself. But I have in my power the one who *does* know, and she will never tell until I bid her."

At the close of Onnorann's speech Kearn started up and pressed his hands hard to his temples.

"You are a devil!" he articulated chokingly.

"Am I?" was the calm, inquiring return.

"I say you are a very devil! For years you have seen me suffer all that man could bear! You are without feeling—you have no mercy! See me—a weak, miserable frame, twice aged in years and woe. Will you use it?"

"Take me up-stairs. Let me see this woman once more!" Kearn cried.

"What good will it do?" demurred On-

norann. "You have seen her often enough."

"Just once more!" pleaded Kearn nervously.

"And when you find, as I tell you you will, that it is a mere waste of breath, do you think you'll accede to my wishes?"

"I promise nothing. But take me to her—just once more—just once."

A strong excitement was working in the breast of the speaker; he clasped his hands beseechingly as he pleaded the favor.

The physician appeared to be debating inwardly for several seconds.

Presently he sounded a bell that was on the table before him, and the summons was answered by a young mulatto girl.

"Remain here until I return. Lock the door, and admit no one," he ordered; adding: "Come, now, we'll go up-stairs. But I tell you, friend Kearn, you might as well hope to go to Heaven on a bird-kite as to get the information you want, until I bid this woman tell you. I have, heretofore, granted you these *seeming* chances, only to add to your misery. I knew you might question her till your tongue was sore, in vain. I will not conceal that fact. But, I am growing tired of it. This is the last time—mind, I say it is the last—"

"Come—come!" interrupted Kearn, brokenly.

They ascended to the third story, and paused before a thick, square-set door.

"Hark!" admonished Onnorann.

They heard a low, weird, nasal voice coming from the apartment beyond the door, rising in one of those peculiar melodies that enliven the soul at a camp-meeting of colored people.

"Hear her. That's the way she spends most of her time. But, she's contented in her captivity, for the poor blind thing couldn't live if I were to cast her out."

"Let us speak to her—let us speak to her!" Kearn's voice was strangely husky, as he drew closer to the physician and uttered the quick words.

Onnorann stepped to the door, and opened a small slide in one of the top panels, saying, as he did so:

"It's no use, I tell you. Comply with my conditions, friend Kearn, or the secret dies when the life of that shriveled form goes out. Look; do you think she will live long?"

CHAPTER IV.

NIGHT-OWL PROWLERS.

"What is't to love, if love has no return!
'Tis better to have all than half of none!
And if responsive fires refuse to burn,
Then best to bid the passion'd dream begone!"
—ANON.

Not very far from the Public Landing, at foot of Jefferson avenue, St. Louis, we single out a dwelling—or uncouth building that had long remained shut, and was apparently tenantless.

The houses on either side of it were empty, because rumor told of strange sounds that were sometimes heard issuing from the ghostly edifice.

Entering an alleyway—narrow, damp, and black till one could scarce see his hand before his face—those who were "posted" discovered a door in the side of the establishment, far in the rear. This door opened into a kind of entry that was narrower and darker than the alley without.

Then there was another door, through the keyhole of which shot a slim ray of light to guide the comer, as he groped wearily ahead.

At last the nature of the place is ascertained, by passing this second door—to find oneself in a large, square, closely-cased room, rather brilliantly lighted by a number of lamps that were fixed in brackets around the walls, and whose reflectors were polished to the smoothness of glass.

Within this room were assembled, at least, a dozen men. Some wore blue check or red flannel shirts and heavy boots; others were better dressed; though, in all, a motley gathering of "longshore roughs" and coarse-visaged boatmen.

At one side was an apology for a bar, presided over by a burly fellow whose eyes were keen as daggers, whose countenance was

fierce as it was ugly, and whose muscular frame was gigantic.

The men were seated at boxes, and on boxes, engaged with dice, dominoes, cards and checkers; and small piles of money were being constantly swept in by a lucky winner.

Liquor flowed freely. It was evident—from the rolling eyes, red noses, and thick whispers—that many were already feeling the warmth of the whisky kept here; yet there was not a loud word, not one sound of noisy tongues, for all knew the value of a guarded speech while gambling in the mysterious and unlicensed den.

Daniel Cassar—or “Big Dan,” as he was called—the proprietor of the rendezvous, was leaning with his elbows on the counter, and his bristling face resting in his hard, brown hands, surveying this sociable company.

Presently a hand ascended—so many fingers were displayed; and Dan proceeded to hurry forward the liquor called for—whisky, only whisky, always whisky, for it was the sole staple-stimulus.

As he set the waiter and cups on the box beside the party who had ordered the treat, two men entered at the door.

Dan's eyes brightened, and, while he nodded to them, he jerked his thumb over his shoulder, significantly:

“How's this?” said one, questioningly. “Where's Jake? The door's open to the police, as well as anybody else.”

“Jake's sick,” replied the giant. “There ain't nobody to stand guard, 'cause I have to be in *here*. No danger, I guess. Go in there—with another motion of the thumb—“Ruby's been a-waitin' for you.”

The two men immediately advanced to a portion of the casing behind the counter, and disappeared through a hole that worked upon concealed hinges, and which gave ingress to a secret apartment beyond.

Hardly had these parties gone out of sight when Big Dan started to a listening attitude, and raised one hand to invoke strictest silence.

He had detected a stealthy footstep in the passage, and knew it could not be one of the initiated and regular customers of the place.

“Hist, boys!—jump, there! Police!” he exclaimed, in a hissing whisper—and, instantly, a man sprung toward each lamp, while he turned the key silently in its well-oiled lock.

Quick as thought, the lights were extinguished. In concert with this movement, Dan grabbed up the glasses that were standing round, placed them on the counter, and then knelt down to press a spring in the floor.

A hand tried the door-knob, and a low voice on the outside said:

“There's somebody in here. But the door's locked.

“Kick 'er in!” suggested a second voice.

As Dan pressed the spring, the bar, with all it contained—for dice, cards and all were deposited upon it by prompt hands—glided swiftly and noiselessly downward.

With the agility of monkeys, the men crept to the hole thus made, and Dan, uttering a snake-like hiss to guide them, leaped down to the counter, and thence to the earthen floor of the cellar.

There was a shuffling of feet, much jostling—but not one word; and when all were down, the trap closed over them, with a sharp click.

And none too soon. The door was kicked open with a spiteful quiver, and a lantern flashed in, discovering three policemen, who carried cocked revolvers, half-raised.

But they saw only an empty room, containing a few innocent-looking and unsuggestive boxes.

“I'll swear I saw two men come in here, not five minutes ago!” exclaimed one, while amazement was depicted plainly in his features.

“And I'll swear I saw a light coming through this keyhole!” supplemented another.

“Say,” suggested the third of the trio, crowding closer to his companions, “look-a-here—I heard a noise in this room—I'm sure of it.”

“So did I.”

“And I.”

“I believe it's a haunted house, after all,” continued the timid individual, tremblingly.

The three exchanged glances. The words were not without effect.

Each experienced a peculiar sensation—a half-start, half-chill.

“But,” said the first, whisperingly, “I've been watching this old ranch for forty-eight hours. I tell you I've counted fourteen men and a woman come in here since sundown.”

“All ghosts,” ventured No. 3, with a wise look.

Again each glanced into his companion's face.

And, as if to augment the superstitious feeling that was fast seizing them, there sounded a loud, long, unearthly laugh, coming from the story above.

“H-a-a-a-a! ha!—ha!—ha!—ha!—ha!” rung the wild, weird, startling scream, piercing their ears, with its sharpness, like a razored knife.

It came with such suddenness, the effect was so electrical, that the lantern slipped to the floor, and put itself out as it crashed and jingled on the boards.

“Lord deliver us!”

“Look!—look there!” blurted he who had first mentioned the presence of spirits.

Directly opposite to where they stood was a gigantic skeleton, whose bones and skull seemed to be ablaze and smoking.

Bang! bang! bang! went the three revolvers, in rapid succession.

And, as the bullets sunk harmlessly into the casing, there was another laugh, issuing from beneath their feet—this time, deep, guttural, mocking, accompanied by a series of faint tapping sounds that drew near along the floor, like the heel-thuds of an invisible something approaching.

Frightened, preyed upon by a superstitious dread, they turned and fled, bumping, excitedly, against one another, as they dashed from the house.

Half an hour subsequent to the visit of the police, a figure emerged from the alley—this one followed by two more; and one of the last that came was a female, who wore a hooded cape and close-fitting garments of black.

She crossed to the opposite side of the street, and moved rapidly away; the two men followed after.

It was a long walk she led them; one, two, three miles—and, at last, she paused before a narrow gateway in the wall that inclosed the garden at the rear of Cyrus Winfield's residence.

They meant to enter here, for one of the men advanced to the bars, and began to tamper with the lock.

“Perry?” spoke the female, inquiringly.

“Well, Queen Ruby?” returned the man at the lock.

“Make haste, or we may be discovered.”

“It is fastened tight—curse the hand that turned the key!” and he gave the bars a wrench as he growled the words.

But main force would not accomplish their ends. It was not until they had tried a bunch of keys—which the second man had brought—that they effected an opening.

No one was in sight. The hour was growing late, and the vicinity was deserted.

They stepped quickly inside, being careful to close the gate after them, and skulked behind a luxuriant evergreen that grew near.

“Wait here till I return,” ordered she called Queen Ruby.

She left them in the shadows of the bush, and made her way cautiously toward the veranda, when a bright light streamed out upon the grass, and the outlines of two forms fell across the sward.

With the step of a cat, she gained a position behind a screen of foliage in the small conservatory, and looked in upon Cyrus Winfield and his son.

She was in time to hear much of the dialogue between the two; and the rays from the chandelier, as they shone on her large, dark, lustrous orbs, showed those eyes gleaming with a peculiar sparkle, when she heard the old gentleman say that his every cent was deposited in the large desk in the office-library.

“It will soon be mine!” she muttered, *sotto voce*. “Soon you will have none at all,

Cyrus Winfield; and then let us see if your son will not court the smiles and favors of Ilde Wyn! O-h! how I am loving you, Hugh Winfield! And you shall love *me*, if there is virtue in woman's charms, and if you are not stronger than other men. Ay, you may despise me—both; you may speak sneeringly of her who dares not mingle where you mingle; but, I do not hear it—I am deaf—for I am loving you, Hugh, as woman only can love! You shall be mine—and it will be strange if I cannot teach you to forget your prejudices!—sh! he is going.”

She saw Hugh leave the parlor. She waited and watched, in her concealment, till patience threatened to desert her.

After awhile Cyrus Winfield went from the parlor, and she heard his step ascending the stairs.

When the servant came to shut and fasten the veranda door, those two starry eyes instantly noted his every movement; and when he put out the lights, and sought his bed, it was with the feeling that his nightly duty had been well done, and that the slumbering household was secure.

Perhaps an hour passed. Then a set of nimble fingers undid the fastenings; the woman's form slipped out, and toward the spot where her companions waited.

“Perry?”

“Here!” hissed a voice in the bush.

“'Tis time. Come on—come, Neol.”

The three glided forward through the gloom.

“Perry—there is a rich prize for you in the library.”

“How do you know it?” asked the guarded voice.

“He told me so a half-hour since; though he had no idea of an eavesdropper.”

“Told you where his money was—is?”

“Yes.”

“Satan favors thieves!” commented the man. “Lead on, Queen Ruby—to the library. Step with care, Neol.”

“Ay,” responded Neol.

They entered the veranda.

Perry paused here, to light a dark-lantern; and when he had thrust this underneath his coat, they continued out to the broad hall, turning toward the staircase, with Queen Ruby leading the way.

CHAPTER V.

“COUNT ON ME!”

“Whene'er the fate of those I hold most dear
Tells to my fearful breast a tale of sorrow,
Oh, bright-eyed Hope! my morbid fancy cheer;
Let me awhile thy sweetest comforts borrow.”
—KEATS.

At the moment the three spectral figures came out of the den, and started off up the street, a man was standing on the other side, directly opposite the alley.

When they were out of sight, this party glanced searchingly around him, as if to make sure that he was not spied upon, and then crossed over.

He entered the alley. As he neared the door, in the side of the house, a man came out—paused for a moment on the rickety stoop—then hurried away.

The new-comer drew back into the deep gloom of the place, and waited.

“There are more to come,” he thought.

And he was right. The business of the den was broken up for that night, and Dan Cassar was dismissing his guests.

One by one they came out, with a few minutes of space between each—until all had departed.

The watcher waited a long time, after the last skulker had disappeared, and, as no more came, he presently advanced to the door.

“It is bolted”—trying the knob, and finding it fast; and he gave two low, signaling raps on the panel.

The knock was recognized. Dan replied by opening.

“Halt, there! Who is it?” came guardedly from the interior.

“I—Mandor.”

“Come in, then.”

The comer stepped inside the dark passage, striking a match as he went, and proceeding like one who knows his ground well.

When Dan had rebolted the door, he followed on the heels of his visitor, who paused in the side-room, and said:

"How's this, Dan?—cleaned out."

"Yes. The police was here awhile gone—"

"Ah!"

"They purty near caught us, too. Jake's sick, an' so we hadn't no guard. The phosph'rus skeleton skeered 'em off; and Ruby clumb up in the wall an' let out that wild laugh o' hern. But, go into the room, there."

The sliding panel in the wall-casing—through which, in our last chapter, we saw the two men vanish—led to a secret apartment; and to this Dan and his visitor continued on.

The room was small, and admirably concealed. There were no windows; but a large flue, at one side, afforded sufficient ventilation. Up this flue was a ladder leading to the back of a fireplace in one of the second-story rooms; and from the fireplace, Queen Ruby had vented the strange, unearthly laugh that forced the confusion and retreat of the three policemen.

There was comfort displayed in the furniture; and in a corner was a rich couch, on which the giant was wont to stretch his huge limbs in nightly slumber.

Dan motioned the other to a chair, and drew up one for himself.

"Yes, it was a purty *clus* shave, Mandor. An' now, the next thing 'll be a investigation. I must clean out to-morrow night."

"I would do so, if I were you, and quit this kind of business. A man who has accumulated as much money as you have, ought to buy himself a genteel house, and live right. Are you not tired of it?"

"Well, yes, *kinder*," replied the bulky fellow, half turning his head, and screwing up his thick-lipped mouth, while he gazed down at the carpet. "But, you know, there's a old *sayin'*: 'once a thief, always a thief.' An' I'm afeard Dan Cassar won't ever 'fit' in a good position."

"Take my advice, and try it. But, now to business."

Dan's visitor was a man somewhat over forty years, rather thin in feature and limb, and very pale—but broad across the shoulders, and with eyes that would seem to read the inmost thoughts of another when conversing. There was a constant expression of sadness in his face, and the lips had not smiled for years.

With his last speech, he looked very grave; and gazed steadfastly into the countenance of his companion.

"Business?" repeated Dan, inquiringly.

"Well, now, you don't mean to tell me 'at you've disklivered anything, have you?"

"That is precisely it."

"O-h!"

"I told you, fifteen years ago, that Calvert Mandor would find out certain things; and, at last, after a long, wearisome search, I believe I am on the scent."

"Go-on," pressed the giant, interestedly.

"A strange fate has kept me from meeting Wilbur Kern for nineteen years—ever since that night that you picked me up, a bleeding lump of flesh, by the roadside," and an emotional feeling swayed the speaker, just here, for he added, tremulously: "I shall never, never forget what you did for me, Dan—how you so kindly nursed me through four whole years of darkness—"

"There—there," interrupted Dan, raising and waving his great brown hand, "jest let up, if you please. I foun' you purty nigh done for, an' if I'd been a worse feller 'n I am, I couldn't 'a' let you lay there an' die. So, never mind that 'ere portion—jest go on."

"Well," resumed Mandor, after a brief pause, "as I said, I've not seen Wilbur Kern for nineteen years. I knew—as you did—that he had married my wife; but she had every reason to believe me dead, and so I don't blame her—no, I don't blame her. To-day, though, I saw Kern. I knew him, despite the time that has elapsed since we last met."

"O-h-o! An' did you buckle onto 'im right off?"

"Wait. Some nameless influence prompted me to follow him, without speaking;

and he led me to the office of Doctor Onnorann."

"The man 'at you hate, an' who's hated you ever since you was both little babies."

"Yes."

"An' what else? Go on."

"I dogged him into the house. When he entered the office, I listened outside the door."

"Hear anything?"

"Enough to convince me that Theophilus Onnorann possesses secrets which I must learn."

"Ah-hum!" Dan was deeply interested, and nodded his large head wisely.

"I heard Wilbur Kern ask where his child was. Perhaps he can tell me where mine is."

"P'raps 'e can," acquiesced Dan.

"He holds some great secret, that I know. Grasping at straws as I am, I will not let any hope escape me. Day after to-morrow I shall see him. It will be to him like the rising of the dead—"

"*Kinder!*" put in the giant, with emphasis.

"Feeling as I do, that I can gain some information from him—for there is a strange, prophetic spurring in my breast—I will wring something from his lips."

"Yes—wring it out 'im."

"If I fail here, I will see Kern afterward. I know where he lives, for I tracked him to his home."

"Good."

"But I do not think I shall fail. If Onnorann will not speak straight, I will even go so far as threats, and try what the power of fear can do. He has felt what my nature is, in my younger days, and knows that I will not trifle. Will you aid me in the latter case, Dan?"

"Aid you?" He looked into Mandor's pale face for a second, and then answered, while he quietly bared and held aloft his brawny, muscular arm, and doubled his sledge-hammer fist. "Do you see that 'ere arm an' that 'ere fist?—at has licked more men in a year an' you could reckon? Jest count on that, Colonel Mandor, whenever you hev need for 't."

"Thank you, Dan, thank you. That's why I came here—to ask if I could rely on you. 'For,' he added, sadly, "I am all shattered and weak, now—not strong and defiant as I once was. I have never recovered from that terrible fall, and," his voice sinking to a huskiness, "the news that aided in robbing me of reason."

"No," said Big Dan, shaking his head slowly. "You were always weak and pale like, ever sence that 'ere time—"

"But, stop. It makes me wretched to dwell upon the past—even while it affords me a relief to speak of it. Let us say no more of it. You will stand by me, you say?"

"You can jest consider me engaged," with a nod.

"Then, I'll see you in the afternoon, to-morrow. Will you meet me at the corner of Biddle and — streets?"

"I'll be there."

"And I'll let you know what has happened. Now I'll go."

Dan went with him to the door.

"Be careful like, now; them police is worse 'an hawks."

"Yes. Good-night."

"Good-night."

As Cassar returned to the secret chamber, and drew off his boots, preparatory to retiring, he was muttering to himself:

"He's a real square chap, Mandor is, an' I won't be found wantin' when he says I can help 'im. Stut! stut! stut! I wish he could find that little gal of his'n."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROBBERY.

"Withering—withering—all are withering—
All of Hope's flowers that youth hath nurs'd—
Flowers of love too early blossoming;
Buds of Ambition too frail to burst."

—HOFFMAN.

HUGH WINFIELD, from his position at the library window, watched the dimly-discernible forms that were approaching the house in a way which boded no good intent.

"What can it mean?" he asked himself. "See—they enter the veranda. There's evil

afloat. Ha!—thieves, as sure as heaven. I will alarm the household."

He left the window and hastened toward the door.

But, ere he could lay his hand on the knob, he caught the sound of a tip-toeing step on the stairs.

He paused irresolute. Should he dash out and give the alarm, or could he match these intruders with his own strength and put them to flight?

There were but two, he thought; and while standing undecided, the door was pushed gently open.

He had barely time to draw back, when a figure brushed past him, and was closely followed by another.

"Give me the lantern, Perry," said the first that entered. "You and Neol rummage the desk, while I guard, and turn the light on you."

"Villains!" cried Hugh, bounding forward.

He dealt a telling blow, for Perry reeled up against the wall, venting a horrible oath that was drawn out, part by pain, part by anger.

But the young man was deceived in the number he expected to deal with.

No sooner did he strike than he was grasped from behind by an unlooked-for foe, and Neol pinioned his arms scientifically, while he hissed:

"Up here, Perry! Choke the fool!"

Perry regained his feet in an instant; and ere Hugh could realize the trap into which he had thrown himself, he was being strangled by a set of iron fingers, while he was held powerless in Neol's vise-like embrace.

He could not cry out; he could not resist.

His senses began to swim; he knew they were killing him—and all as silently, as surely, as if the scene had been rehearsed.

In vain he tugged and strained, till his face purpled with exertion.

Ruby sprung to the door and closed it, that no possible noise might awaken the sleepers in the rooms beyond.

In doing this, one quick ray from the lantern flashed across her eyes.

For a second the suffocating man, by a superhuman effort, forced his throat from the mad grip of his assailant.

"Those eyes! those eyes!" he articulated in a gulping, gurgling voice; and then consciousness left him—he sunk limp and heavy in the arms of Neol.

"Anybody up?" were the first whispered words of Perry, as he turned from the motionless, lifeless form.

"Sh!" Ruby invoked silence, and the three listened.

But, all was still.

"No," she said, "all's quiet. Come—now for the prize."

They bound and gagged the young man, and when he was rendered utterly helpless, in case of recovery, they proceeded to the business of the night.

It was the morning subsequent.

Hugh had been found and liberated at an early hour by one of the servants, and consternation spread through the house when he narrated what had occurred.

It was fortunate for him that insensibility came when it did. It had saved his life. Had he struggled much longer, the grip Perry fastened on his throat would have clung there till death ensued.

Cyrus Winfield was striding to and fro in the parlor, white and haggard, and running his fingers through his disheveled hair, as he groaned aloud, in mental agony.

He was a ruined man! The robbers had done their work thoroughly.

In his room, Hugh Winfield sat like one in a melancholy dream. A friend had called, only a few moments previous, and to him—an old, tried associate—Hugh had unburdened his mind, telling of everything that was then eating at his heart like the gnawings of a poison-fanged serpent.

"Look here, Hugh, you talk like a jack-daw, if I must say it! What do you mean by such nonsense?"

"Those eyes! those eyes!" murmured Hugh, absently; "only one such pair of eyes in all the world I have gazed into

them too often to be mistaken. They were Zella's eyes! They were Zella's!"

"If you keep on this way, I'll report you as a subject for the mad-house! Behave yourself."

"I saw them plainly by the light of the lantern," went on the other, as if he were dwelling solely on the tableau of the night gone.

"It's simply a case of insanity! Your mind is full of this girl, and that fact, coupled to your father's desires, has tended to upset your ideas. But, pshaw! you know you don't really care anything for Zella Kearn—"

"I tell you I do!" interrupted the young man, in a sort of frenzy. "I tell you I love her—and I never knew till now how much, how madly!" He pressed his hands to his throbbing temples, and stared, half-wildly, downward.

"But you will soon forget her—"

"Never—*never*—so long as I live!"

"It is a mere fascination, which time will cure. I've seen you 'taken' with pretty faces before, you know."

"Call it what you will. My heart yearns for her! my whole soul is in misery! Oh, God! what shall I do?"

"Do your duty," said his friend, a little sternly. Forget that Zella Kearn ever lived—"

"Impossible!"

"Save your father from this abyss of trouble, by winning the hand and fortune of Ilde Wyn."

Hugh looked hard into his friend's face. He became calm, as he asked:

"Is it right that I should make myself miserable for life, in order to secure the peace of one who would be content to see me so?"

"The case will not bear question," reasoned the other. "I am an old friend of yours, Hugh, and I tell you your duty lies in the course I have named. Besides, think of your mother; it would be hard—ay, death to her—to assume a life of drudgery, after being accustomed so long to the ease of wealth."

"Don't speak of it—don't! You will drive me mad!" and his voice broke in a husky, tremulous whisper.

"Have you any cause to believe that Zella Kearn loves you?"

"None—none; and that is why this fire in my own heart is fanned till it has made me fairly desperate."

"There is no great harm done then. Give Zella up at once, and turn your whole nature toward Ilde Wyn. Have you ever seen her?"

"No."

"I have. She is a beautiful girl; and, by-the-by, she is enough like Zella to be her sister—only one is a dark blonde, and the other a brunette."

There was a long pause.

"Yes, I will do my duty," Hugh said, at length, with his glance still bent thoughtfully on the carpet, while the words fell slowly from his lips.

"That's right—"

"But I must see Zella once more. I must bid her a long farewell."

"I wouldn't go near her again, if I were you; it may make matters worse."

"No—I must. Don't protest; 'tis useless. I must look into her sweet face once more—for the last time," and then he moaned, passionately, as his head sunk to his hands. "Zella! Zella!—oh, how I wish you could be mine!"

Half an hour later he ordered his horse, and started away from the house.

He looked into the parlor as he passed out through the hall, and beheld there the scene of wretchedness—the sad scene of his father's harrowed mind.

And this seemed to strengthen him in his resolution to bid Zella Kearn a farewell forever, for he compressed his lips tightly, and clinched one fist, while his eyes kindled with sympathetic emotion.

It was a long ride, yet he did not urge his animal, for, long ere he escaped from the crowded, busy thoroughfares, and entered the smooth, quiet road, he was absorbed in a painful meditation upon the sacrifice he was about to make.

He knew now how ardently he loved Zella; perhaps he might never have been con-

vinced of it, had not this ordeal been presented—perhaps, would have lived on under the nameless spell she seemed to have involuntarily woven round him, and which, of itself, was hard to be endured, because of its very strangeness.

"Zella! Zella!" he broke forth, as the horse walked slowly on; "oh, if you only knew what I am compelled to feel, you would wish, at least in sympathy, as I do—that we had never met! May God forgive me, if I have ever done or said too much, that would tend to win your love!—for it is enough that I should be so miserable, without your sharing it."

Speaking thus, he aroused from his absent state, and jerked the reins.

The spirited animal leaped forward into a brisk gallop, bearing its rider onward toward the cottage home.

"After all," he thought, "the affection is only on my side; then let us see if I cannot be more of a man, and bring the iron of the Winfield nature to my aid."

But, ah, how mistaken he was!

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORDS OF FATE.

"Oh, ye, whose cheek the tear of pity stains,
Draw near with pious reverence and attend."
—BURNS.

THERE was a peculiarly significant expression in the narrow face of Theophilus Onnorann as he opened the slide in the panel of the door and said:

"Look! do you think she will live long?"

His long, skinny finger pointed in at the solitary occupant of the room, and his keen, spectacled eyes fixed hard upon Wilbur Kearn.

The latter stepped quickly forward and placed his face to the opening.

The apartment was handsomely furnished, but it was a prison—for the windows were barred across and the door was heavily locked.

Near the center of the room, at a worktable sat a bent and shriveled form—a quadrone woman, who was well on toward the completion of a century of years.

Her face was sickeningly attenuated by age; teeth she had none; there was scarce sufficient flesh to cover the bones; a mere living thing, and nothing more—save that, as if time had seen fit to spare one relic of youthful beauty, a mass of jetty hair fell, like a volume of silken thread, over her pointed shoulders and down nearly to the door.

She had been working with knitting-needles when the sound of comers fell upon her ear; and now she ceased, letting the weird song die on her lips, while she listened attentively.

"Beula! Beula!" cried Wilbur Kearn.

Slowly she turned her head; but she did not look at the man who uttered her name, for she was sightless. The two eyes were sunk deep into the head in blindness, and they were eyes that had in earlier years shone with all the luster of gems.

"Beula! Beula!" he cried again; "I am here once more. Hear me. Answer me. Where—where is my child? Where is Olse?"

She arose from the chair and took a step toward the door—pausing and gathering up those long, rich tresses, as if they were her jealous care, and while she wound the black mass round her throat, she croaked:

"It's Wilbur Kearn! It's Wilbur Kearn! O-h-o! Wilbur Kearn!"

"Yes, yes, it is I, Beula. I am here, as I have been so often before, to beg, to implore you—tell me, tell me—where is my child?"

The blind woman rocked from limb to limb, and the sightless orbs were turned upon him.

"O-h-o! your child? Ha! ha! he! he!—yes, you've a child, a pretty child. But where will you find her?—ho! h-o! I know! I know!"

"Beula, tell me! By all the kindness ever shown you in this world, by your hopes of gaining heaven when you die, I invoke you to take this load of misery from my breast! Oh, could you but see me!—could you but know the grief that's in my heart! Tell me, Beula—tell me—where is my child?"

The withered creature grinned.

"No use! No use!" answered the croaking voice. "Remember—remember the words of fate!"

"Those words of fate!—"

"Ay, ay; the words of fate!"

"Oh, God! I know not what they mean."

"I have told you what they mean," whispered the physician in Wilbur's ear.

"No, no; they cannot—"

"But they *do*," and the whisper was almost a hiss; "so be warned ere it is too late. She will go off suddenly, and that very soon. If I am not able to swear to her that the prophecy is fulfilled, then the secret will die with her."

"Merciful Heaven pity me!" groaned Kearn, in an agony of spirit.

Just then came the blind woman's voice again.

"Hear, Wilbur Kearn!—hear the words of fate!"

"One twice wedded, wife of two,
Child by each, and a child that's lost;
One who never father knew,
And one who's on life's billows tost.
Marry the first to him who tried
To win the widow whose first love died;
Then will the last one be restored,
And balm on sorrow's wounds be poured."

"Ho—h-o! the words of fate! Go, Wilbur Kearn, and mark them well."

She turned and felt her way back to the chair, resuming her work with the needles and starting afresh the song they had interrupted.

"Beula! Beula! in the name of mercy, relieve an old man of his woe! Oh! has your heart turned to stone?—when you stand upon the very brink of death!—when you know that you must soon go before your God! Do this one act of kindness, of *justice* ere you die. Beula!"

And he almost screamed the words, while he clasped his hands and a flood of tears gushed over his cheeks.

"Will you not tell me where she is?—*my child!*"

But the woman worked steadily on, only shaking her head and raising her song to a louder key.

One moment he stared wildly at the blind being who held the secret he so longed to learn; then, with one great moan, like the wail of winter in its sighful sweep, he sunk backward into the arms of Doctor Onnorann.

The physician calmly caught the insensible form, and sustained it while he refastened the slide.

Then he half-dragged Kearn along the hall, down the stairs, and into his office, where he laid him upon the sofa.

Dismissing the mulatto girl, he applied himself arduously to the task of restoring the stricken man to consciousness.

And while thus engaged he was muttering, lowly:

"What's the use? He might as well try to file sawdust off a rainbow as to get that secret without complying with the conditions."

He hitched his chair close to the sofa on which Kearn lay.

Pretty soon the latter opened his eyes. With the physician's aid he sat up, though his head drooped forward to his hands and his elbows rested on his knees.

"Feel any better?" inquired Onnorann, very low, very mildly.

"I don't know—what was the matter?" absently.

"Oh, why you fainted, that's all. The same as you always do when you go up to see Beula and learn that there's no use of fighting against this thing."

The words had the effect of warming Kearn's blood. He raised his head and gazed at the doctor, though that gaze was wavering.

"Man!—man! oh, if you *are* a man, and not the demon you would seem to be, are you not satisfied with what you have done? See these tears! Look at me: trembling, weak, despairing—"

"Now, friend Kearn, be reasonable."

He drew out a penknife and began paring his nails, wisely attentive to his own scientific use of the blade.

"You heard the 'words of fate,' didn't you?"

"Yes—yes," in a subdued tone; "they are a mystery to me."

"I have endeavored to make them plain."

"No, no, no; impossible."

"Wilbur Kearn," with a slow, measured, emphatic accent, "let me impress it upon you for the last time: 'until you arrange it so that I shall marry Zella, you will never learn from Beula's lips where to find your own child. I say 'your own,' because it is not generally known that Zella is your step-daughter—she having assumed your name at her mother's death. Now, what I say is just as sure as aggravated measles are ugly!"

"No—no; you are old enough to be her father!"

"A matter of no material difference, as your own knowledge of every-day occurrences will show you," argued the doctor quietly, and filing industriously at a sharp corner on his thumb-nail.

"Moreover," he added, after a short pause, "there's another item you seem to forget. You know well enough that you are troubled with a hereditary affection of the heart. 'Um! well, what's the use? You'll drop off before you can wink; and if, by any possible chance, you should get to Heaven, you'll have to wait there another indefinite time before you see your lost child. Comprehend? Now besensible."

"Theophilus Onnorrann, I believe it was you who stole my child from me to glut your hatred for a rival—although you have sworn to me that you did not—"

"Ha! ha! ha!" interrupted Onnorrann—a very low laugh, "perhaps I did, after all. But if I did, friend Kearn, you may rely upon it—I haven't the most remote idea where she is now."

Kearn's eyes lighted with an angry emotion; he glared upon the man before him—so calm, so taunting; then, while his fingers worked convulsively, he sprung up and forward.

"O-h! monster!"

Onnorrann did not fear him physically, yet, to avoid an unpleasant scene that was imminent, he slid out of and behind his chair, on the back of which he grasped and leaned, as he said:

"Be careful, friend Kearn—now, be careful. Excitement is *very* dangerous for a man who has heart disease."

Even as he spoke, the other paused with a cry that lingered in his throat, and clapping one hand to his side, staggered back onto the sofa.

But the pain was only momentary.

Onnorrann was about to resume his seat, and also his play with the man who was virtually in his power, when there came a sharp rap on the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOO LATE! TOO LATE!

"Giv'st thou but one look, sweetheart!"

A word—no more!

It is Music's sweetest part,

Where lips run o'er!

'Tis a part I fain would learn,

So pry'thee here thy lessons turn,

And teach me, to the close,

All Love's pleasure—all its woes!

—CORNWALL.

It was the day following that of Kearn's visit to the physician in the city.

Father and daughter were upon the rose-embowered porch at their fairy-like home, the first seated on a rustic bench—with Zella, as when we first introduced her to the reader, kneeling beside him and toying with her usual favorites, a bouquet of flowers.

She dearly loved the many plants that bloomed so gaudily around her exiled home—they were her especial care, her bright companions; it was rare to see her without a blossom or bud arranged in her bosom or amid the jetty ringlets that clustered on her brow, and she little dreamed how near in the future was the time when she would part with these and other loved associations that cheered her solitude.

Wilbur Kearn was paler than on the day gone. Lines of sadness were traced across his features, and his eyes were restless, weary, wandering.

"Pa, I don't think your visit to town yesterday did you much good."

He was thinking so deeply as to be half-oblivious of his child's presence.

The abruptness of her speech startled him slightly.

"Why?" he asked after a brief silence, and still gazing out over the broad picture of beauty that spread before him.

"Because you look tired and sleepy and worried, and—do you know, pa, I sometimes think you are dreadfully bothered about something—something here, I mean," tapping her finger a couple of times on her forehead. "Now, what is it, I'd like to know?"

Carelessly as she spoke, the words caused him another start, and he moved uneasily.

"Only your imagination," he returned evasively.

"Where did you go to?"

"To—I—I called on Doctor Onnorrann,"

Kearn answered, with a hesitating manner, and his lips compressed, his teeth shut together forcibly, as he thought of his interview with the physician.

"I don't like that man," declared Zella.

"He looks so singular. And when he was here a month ago he watched me all the time through those ugly green spectacles, as if he wanted to eat me up! Ha! ha! ha! he's a very odd person, I think. But, pa—what makes you go to see him so often?"

"You ask too many questions, Zella."

"There it is again!" she exclaimed, with a pout. "You act lately as if I hadn't a right to ask questions. Ayho! what a wretched life!"

"Zella!"

He uttered the one word reproachfully, and glanced down into her half-averted face.

"Oh, don't be angry!" she laughed. "I didn't mean anything."

"Look; here comes some one."

The young man was approaching slowly along the path. He did not see the pair, for his head was hung and his step was thoughtful.

"Penny for your thoughts!" called Zella, as he drew near.

He raised his glance to the beautiful face with its merry smiles. The voice that challenged was a sound that thrilled him more than ever then; it nigh put to flight the little iron of nature he had summoned for the ordeal that was pending.

"Good-day, Mr. Kearn," he said, as Zella's father arose and extended his hand.

"Another bouquet for you—see; isn't it pretty?"

And she held it toward him.

"I believe you always have one ready for me when I come, whether you expect me or not. Thank you."

"Yes; I know you like flowers. Here—let me pin this in your button-hole. My! Now you look grand! Give me your hat. Sit down. Come—"

"Never mind," he interposed, as she reached out her hand to receive his hat, "it is hardly necessary. I have only a few moments to stay."

Unperceived by him, a slight shadow flitted over the lovely face; but it was gone in an instant and the smile was gayer than ever as she exclaimed:

"Oh, you *might* stay a long time! Be generous—I don't see anybody from one week to another—that is, besides pa. Do stay. I've much to talk about—though what, I don't know. I'll try my best to make you forget your watch. Ha! ha! ha! Come, sit down—oh, I forgot to ask you if you are well to-day?"

And on she went, until she had to laugh at her own unceasing chatter.

Kearn withdrew shortly, and the young couple wandered out upon the flowery parterre.

Winfield had a trying task before him. He had come to bid this lovely girl farewell forever—to see her for the last time; yet his tongue would not mold the words he wished to speak, and it seemed impossible to tear himself away.

All the subtle influences that had made his heart lean toward her now redoubled within him. She had never looked so beautiful as then. The great, deep fascination that held him was gaining strength with every moment of his stay in her society.

While she was talking and laughing continuously in her gay, happy way, he was forcing himself to smile and partake of her

humor, though his breast was racked and paining.

It was no longer a doubt; he *knew* he loved this sunny, artless fairy with all the ardor of a willing soul.

"Zella, why don't you write poetry?—fiction, romance? If I lived in such a Paradise as this, I would find it hard to resist the temptations offered in the pursuit."

"Oh, I haven't any taste that way—though I admire it. See—what a handsome rose! Here's a geranium leaf. Take it home to remember me by."

"Why not cultivate a taste?—it will come easily," he continued, adhering to the subject. "There is everything around you to paint the rarest of pictures in a pliant fancy. With such airs of sweets, such museful atmospheres, it were strange if inspiration, coupled to your ready thought, did not produce those works which search out the deepest sympathies and reap the golden harvest of the world's admiration."

"I want to be an artist, Mr. Winfield. And there's everything here to engage the artist's eye, as well as the poet's. Perhaps my ambition will be gratified, some day. But, ayho! it's an uncertain world we live in: to-day we are hopeful, to-morrow we are sad."

"Time!"—and his voice sunk as he replied in a way more significant than, perhaps, she perceived; "we may calmly watch the shadows of a changeable fate—reckon aptly on the casting of a die—build bright palaces in the glad Utopia of mind's imaginings—ay, even school the senses to banish their gloom in the sweet realization of present joys; but, where is the panacea to dispel the sadness that ever follows in the wake of bliss?—where the elixir to perpetuate forgetfulness of woe—where the power to forever retain to us the brilliant dreams of happiness that momentary hopes have painted?"

It was a mournful tone in which he ceased. A long silence ensued, for he little knew how deeply the import of that speech searched to the heart of his listener.

But time had flown rapidly and unheeded as they lingered there. He roused from the gloom of melancholy which had seized him.

"Good-by, Zella! I must go now."

He would have parted thus abruptly, for he felt it was his only honest course.

Something was struggling within her heart for expression. She grew pale and tremulous, and to his astonishment, dropping on her knees, she broke forth in a plea of tearful tenderness.

"Oh, Mr. Winfield, don't go—don't leave me. You have taught me to love you and here I own it, for I can no longer hold my heart in leash."

No longer a childlike, thoughtless girl—but a woman, with a woman's greatest passion aroused, and her whole being absorbed in a wild, idolizing affection!

He gazed at her with a vacant, half-unearthly expression; and as the confession came from her lips, he could have shrieked in the terrible misery that gripped his heart.

Too late! Too late! rung the voice of conscience; and while he met the glance of the pure, beautiful girl who had now laid bare the most sacred secret of her bosom, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and his lips remained shut, as if they were glued, and pressed upon by an invisible hand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TEST OF IRON.

"Thy life was all one oath of love to me!
Sworn to me daily, hourly, by thine eyes!"
—KNOWLES.

"Oh! ye who cast away a heart's deep love,
Remember, ere affliction disappears,
That keen, reproachful sobs your soul may
move,
Like his who lives to mourn life's early years."
—LAWSON.

WE must not censure Zella for this avowal of affection for Hugh Winfield.

His many pretty speeches, his more than ordinary attentions, his ardent glances, and, above all, the fatal kiss which he bestowed the day previous, when warned by the irresistible influence of that fascination for which he could find no name, and which he could not shake off—all these had had their effect upon the tender susceptibilities of the young

girl's heart, until, in her fullful nature, she could almost have yielded up her very soul a sacrifice to the man around whose neck she now clung.

What, to her, were the unmaidenly features of the action?—if it be unmaidenly for an honest passion to break its imprisoning chains and seek responsive sentiment? She was blind to everything, save this deep, deep, uncontrollable feeling.

She only knew she loved him, and that he must know it.

"Don't go yet, Hugh—stay a little longer," and arising, she threw her arms around his neck and raised her dark eyes dreamily to meet his own.

"Oh, God! what have I done?" he moaned, as his own head sunk to that which nestled so confidently on his breast—nestled there as if its owner already felt how he was worshipping her, and as if he had wooed her and won her sacred promises, in so many lover's words.

Something was choking in his throat. Great tears started to his eyes; his voice, for a time, deserted him, when he had uttered that speech of agony.

How could he give her up, now?

But he thought of his father, of the ruin that stared them in the face, and of his resolution to save the sinking parent. For several seconds, two mighty loves were battling within him—his heart was bleeding while the conflict raged.

Then came the summoning of iron.

"Zella! Zella! I am a miserable, heartless wretch!"

She looked up at him, in surprise, but said nothing.

"Oh! forgive me, Zella."

"Forgive you?" she repeated, inquiringly.

"I do not deserve your love!—I do not deserve it!"

"Why, Hugh?" and the dark eyes gazed wonderingly into his pallid face.

"Zella!—Heaven pity me!—you should, rather, hate me. I do love you, Zella—ay, more, I know, than man ever loved woman. But, I—I came to-day—to see you for the last time, to bid you good by, forever! And I had hoped— Oh! how I prayed—that I had never done, or spoken, anything to win more than your friendship. But—too late!—too late!"

Tighter grew the girl, wider grew the eyes, as the startled ears half interpreted his meaning.

"I can never, never ask you to be mine, Zella!" he fairly sobbed—for men can weep, when their whole being is torn by such overwhelming woe of spirit.

The face on his breast grew pale as death; the hand that lay upon his shoulder began to tremble.

Lower, lower, sunk the shapely head, with its wealth of jetty curls; yet, though there was a cutting pain tearing at the now hopeless heart, not a word, not a sound came from the nearly bloodless lips.

"Zella!—speak to me."

Silence itself was unbearable.

"I thought you loved me, Hugh—you acted as if you did. And I could not help loving you." Her voice was hushed, and full of an unearthly calmness.

"I do love you!—I do! Can you believe me guilty as I would seem?—oh! can you think I would be guilty of a willful plot against your peace? There is a cruel barrier between us. I cannot wed with you—and do you think I say it with a mind at rest? Hear me, though: I swear to you, if ever that barrier is broken, I'll seek you out, if the search leads me to the utmost corner of the world!—and claim you for my own, if you are not already wedded. Try not to hate me, Zella; though I deserve that you should. Farewell—farewell!" He almost rudely displaced her embrace, and ran from her.

He durst not stay another moment, else all the iron resolve within him could not have resisted the promptings of his passionate adoration!

Zella stood there, motionless as a statue, looking after his fleeing form.

When he had vanished, the dark orbs glistened, and burning tears trickled slowly down her cheeks.

"Oh! Hugh!—Hugh! why did you ever teach me to love you? Why did we ever

meet? Yes—I can forgive you—but—I cannot forget—no, I cannot forget. I will never be happy again!—never!—never!" A low, plaintive murmur, broken by the great, throbbing emotion which made the budding bosom heave, and toned the voice to a wail of sadness.

"Hugh, my son, you will save me?"

Cyrus Winfield met Hugh, as the latter was ascending the stairs to his room, after returning from his painful visit to Zella Kearn.

"Yes, father; yes," impatiently; and he would have continued on, but Winfield, Sr., detained him.

"And, Hugh—let it happen as soon as possible—as soon as possible; will you? The girl loves you. There'll be no difficulty, I know. I have heavy notes to meet, one month from to-day; and I can't 'realize' on anything. I've not got a hundred dollars to my name! Say you will be expeditious with the affair?"

"I will make all haste I can," answered the young man, shutting his teeth hard, and speaking the words as firmly as he could.

Great indeed was the sacrifice about to be made in the interests of this ruined, mind-racked, half crazed old man—a sacrifice that made Hugh feel himself a very villain, while it called for the yielding up of brightest hopes, and the cruel banishment of true love's holiest, most cherished idol.

"You will go to see Ilde Wyn at once?—to-night?" pursued Winfield, sen., in an anxious, uneven tone.

"Yes, father, I will go to-night," returned his wretched son.

"You are a noble boy, Hugh!—a noble boy! God bless you!" He grasped his son's hand and wrung it with grateful fervor.

"Perhaps not so noble as you think, father," said Hugh, with an intense bitterness which the parent could not understand.

"Yes, you are noble. You will save me yet. God bless you!" cried the old man.

"I will try to save you."

The young man hastily continued his ascent of the stairs. For the effect of this scene was to conduce toward an increase of his melancholy and wretchedness.

On the landing he met a shadowy, timid form coming down—a form that stepped aside, as if it would be unnoticed by every one.

But he paused.

"Mother?"

"Hugh," returned the loved voice of her whose name he uttered in a tone that was sadly faint and tremulous.

Mrs. Winfield had long suspected the charm that drew her son to the cottage home; her mother's perception was quick to perceive that Hugh's heart leaned strongly thitherward; and none so readily share the feelings of joy or sorrow, in man, as that one whose name is sacred, even on the lips of the most brutal and depraved—"mother."

Knowing, as she did, the condition of things, and partaking of her son's unhappiness, she had hardly courage to look at him, lest fresh sorrow should ensue.

But he raised the mild, sweet face to his lips, and imprinted a kiss on her pale brow; then passed on, without another word.

Cyrus Winfield stood in the parlor, with the afternoon paper in his hands, reading a thrilling account of the bold robbery on the night previous.

For, through the servants, it had reached outsiders, and the ever-watchful reporters soon seized it.

It was pretty generally known in the business community that Cyrus Winfield had met with heavy losses, recently, and that he was never so pinched in money matters as now; and the journal, in its comments, while it deplored the occurrence, contained a caustic prophecy, that the loss—several thousands—would probably exert a harassing influence in the merchant's outstanding business ventures, and present liabilities. Besides, it was covertly hinted that a man who would deposit so much money in so unsafe a place had but met with the natural consequences of his carelessness.

"Yes, yes, I see how it is!" he cried, crunching the paper in a nervous grip; "they feel gleeful over my loss. They are

envious of my past prosperities; they think I am utterly ruined and broken down—and now bite and snarl at me like curs at the hole of a hunted hare! But they are mistaken. Ha! ha! ha!"—a jerky, hollow laugh—"they have reckoned too quick. I shall be saved!—saved! Then see them come back, licking the ground I tread, fawning for favor! Hugh will marry Ilde Wyn. She will be glad enough to exchange her money for the position such a marriage will bring her. She loves the boy!—she loves him wildly! I could see that in every word she spoke of him. And Hugh will act with speed—Cyrus Winfield will soon be solid again! Ha! ha! ha!"

And up-stairs, in the solitude of his room, Hugh was sitting where he had sat in the morning, when conversing with his friend.

Thoughts again!—deep, woeful burning thoughts were flitting through his heated brain, weaving unrest and despair.

Suddenly, he started. The surroundings recalled an item which had slipped his memory in the keener excitement of the day.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed; "now I think of it, the eyes I saw in Zella Kearn, when the pure girl clung to me, are the eyes I saw last night before my senses deserted me, in the strangling grip of the ruffian! Those eyes!—how the idea haunts me!—yes, I could swear to it! Oh! what maze, what fearful suspicion is this? It cannot be—it cannot be!"

CHAPTER X.

THE PAPERS BEHIND THE BOOKS.

"Why do ye sneer!—

Because he's drunk with wine!

Lend me an ear:

Than either thine or mine,

There's better, shrewder intellects to-day

That fat on drunkenness, though ye do say,

'Tis fiendish."

—ANON.

THAT Doctor Theophilus Onnorann, with all his calmness of exterior, was not free from nervousness, was evident by the quick start he betrayed when the sharp rap for admittance sounded on the door of his office.

But, immediately, he nodded his head, and said:

"Ah! yes. It's Jiggers—Jimmy Jiggers, my man—yes." As he spoke, he advanced to admit the comer, for, upon returning to the room, he had locked the door.

Rap! rap! rap—bang!

The party outside must have been leaning against the panel on which he thumped so loudly, for the moment Onnorann turned the key, the door whizzed open, and the individual shot in, with a reel, a pitch and a stumble, sprawling full length on the floor.

While he is lying there, let us take a look at him.

In stature, he was short; very narrow across the shoulders; bow-legged; a ball-like head; close-cropped and bristling hair; beardless face; a nose decidedly snub—on the end of which was a significant color, made more perceptible by the scrape it received when its owner fell.

He had been carrying a number of books, which now lay scattered in every direction.

After endeavoring to look straight, with a pair of ogle eyes, and seeming hugely astonished at his accident, he presently closed those eyes, vented a grunt, and calmly remained where he was.

The physician stood contemplating him—one hand behind his back, switching his coat-tail, and the other smoothing his pointed chin.

Kearn arose from the sofa, and started to leave.

"I shall see you again," Doctor Onnorann.

"Yes—again. 'Um! Well, remember: the conditions, you know. Don't come to me any more, unless you are prepared to comply. Understand, friend Kearn?"

"I understand. Good-day."

"Good-day, sir."

Kearn looked at him keenly for a second, and then withdrew.

Theophilus Onnorann continued his survey of the prostrate form.

"Rascal!"

"Eh?" The ogle eyes flew open immediately.

"James Jiggers, you are drunk again."

"Drunk?" repeated Jiggers, with unmistakable thickness of accent.

"Yes, sir—you are drunk. I've a notion to carve your head off," laying one hand on a case of scalpels.

The threat brought Jiggers to a sitting posture, and he blinked idiotically at his employer.

"Get up!"

"Yes, good master Doctor, I'll (*hic*) I'll get up," which he did, after a variety of gyrations, and a series of unsteady scrambles.

Then he fixed his ogle eyes on the chair at the desk, toward which he presently dived, and threw himself into it with a jar that shook the room.

His chin sunk o his breast, the eyes closed again, and he began to snore.

Onnorrann produced a small battery, and applied it to the nose of the intoxicated man.

Jiggers slid to the floor, with a thump, and stared wildly upward.

"James Jiggers, I say you are drunk."

"No—I swear I am not, good master Doctor!" sputtered Jiggers, who was, indeed, rather sobered by the startling suddenness of the operation.

"Didn't I pick you out of the street, starving?"

"You *did*," whined the other, with a terrified glance at the battery.

"Didn't you promise to let intoxicating beverages alone, if I employed you?" grasping the crank again, and causing Jiggers to jump.

"I *did*—I did."

"I must cast you into the gutter again," pursued Onnorrann, maliciously.

"I'll drink no more, I vow!" declared Jimmy.

"More: I'll put you down the hole in the back room. You know the—"

"D-d-don't!" he squeaked, in affright.

"With the rats and skeletons," finished his tormentor.

"Good master Doctor!"

"Will you ever drink liquor?"

"Never, I vow!"

Onnorrann left him to regain the chair in the best way he could, and turned to a portion of the shelving, where a few secret pigeon-holes were concealed behind the dusty books.

First rubbing the green spectacles with his handkerchief, he removed two or three books, and drew forth from one of the pigeon-holes a long, worn parchment. Opening this, he began to read in silence.

"So—so," he muttered, presently; "the years go by, and the dates draw near, and still there is no claimant for the will. Ha! ha! ha!"—a low, jubilant chuckle. "Only a few more months, and Theophilus Onnorrann will become the possessor of all mentioned herein—not a little, either. Ah! it was shrewd! very shrewd."

He turned quickly, to glance at Jiggers.

That individual appeared to be asleep, and gave vent to an unusually loud snore, just as Onnorrann wheeled around.

Satisfied that he was not watched, the physician resumed his perusal of the MS., and his mutterings.

"Calvert Mandor did not dream how nicely I was going to get rid of him, after he made his will. And who would have dreamed that I could have imitated it so nicely—inserting a clause, providing, that in case Calvert Mador's heirs did not come forward in a certain time, then the whole bulk of benefit was to revert to me, his honorable friend. Ha! ha! ha! his honorable friend—when we hated each other like two cats with their tails tied together. Yes—yes, it has been solace to me, all these long years. Mandor won from me the only woman I ever loved; and when he died, Wilbur Kearn put fresh gall into my life by marrying the widow, when I, still a little lap-dog at her feet, was seeking her smiles and encouragements. But, I am having my satisfaction!—yes, satisfaction in both cases—a noble satisfaction. Ha! ha! ha! Much of this wealth passed into the wife's hands; then into Kearn's when she died. People don't imagine that Wilbur Kearn, the exile, owns so much in this city, and has a goodly sum stored away at his little home! But I know it; and if—but, never mind. This will has never been known. 'Um! wait till

the proper time. I'll use it—ha! h—a! wait till the proper time."

Restoring the valuable paper to its hiding-place, he took up a broad-brimmed slouch hat from the desk, and advanced to the door. But, after going out and closing the door, he opened it again, and thrust his head in, to look at Jiggers.

The latter was, apparently, more soundly asleep than ever.

But when fully assured that Doctor Onnorrann was gone, James Jiggers opened his eyes, and started upright. The effects of his recent drinking were no longer visible.

He listened intently for a while; then he approached the shelving, at the spot where his employer had been.

"If he catches me, I am as good as dead! He's awful. He'd give me a dose of fish-hooks, and put me down the hole. Ugh! it's a horrid hole," with a shiver. "Hist! Jiggers—beware. Take courage. Your curiosity is wonderful; it will one day put your head in a noose, and your body in a grave. Graves? Ugh! Take courage, Jiggers—take courage," his voice sinking to a whisper.

And the "courage" was contained in a small flask, which he produced from a side pocket, and applied to his lips, while his eyes rolled.

When the flask was put away, he pushed up his sleeves, and, with the ogle eyes widened to their fullest extent, began cautiously to remove the books on the shelf.

"Spring-guns, hand-traps, batteries!" he muttered, whisperingly. "Jim Jiggers, look out."

The task was not without its personal danger—that he knew; and his fingers trembled as he proceeded. For Theophilus Onnorrann, knowing of the fellow's curious, prying nature, had set a number of traps—some of them working on his superstitious mind. But Jiggers was not yet cured. He wanted to see what was so carefully concealed behind the books.

The skull, on the wire, had received a fresh impetus from some source, and was now turning swiftly round and round, much to his disgust and uneasiness.

Soon the books were displaced. Slowly he drew out the parchment he had seen in his employer's hands—though Onnorrann had failed to detect him at his spying.

Jiggers unfolded the MS. as if he expected a snake to dart out of it; then he began to read.

While thus engaged, the door opened noiselessly, and a face peered in.

It was the face of the mulatto girl whom we have seen in a previous chapter.

He did not perceive her. His back was toward her.

He was making an important discovery, and read on, absorbedly.

"Aha! Aha!" a shrill, whispering exclamation. "I'm Jiggers, the drunkard, eh?—Jiggers, the sot! I'm a fool and a dog!—a football for my good master Doctor! Oh-o! what a little secret! James Jiggers, remember this!—remember this!"

CHAPTER XI.

FAREWELL TO HOME!

"The conflict is over, the struggle is past,
I have looked—I have loved—I have worshiped
my last!
And now back to the world, and let Fate do
her worst
On the heart that for thee such devotion hath
nursed."
—HOFFMAN.

ZELLA looked pale and tired when she sat at the tea-table with her father.

The rosy bloom had deserted her cheeks; her eyes were downcast; he missed the gay, chattersome voice that had been wont to enliven their meals together.

But Wilbur Kearn was too preoccupied with thoughts of his own, to notice the remarkable change in her demeanor.

At an early hour Zella retired to her room—not to sleep, but to sob out her bitterness of soul.

"Oh, Hugh!" she would murmur, as she sat by her window, looking out through her tears at the starry sky; "I never knew what love was till you came to me. And now—now when I have learned the lesson so well, you tell me of barriers—tell me we can never

marry! If you only knew how unhappy you have made me! But I cannot hate you for it—no, I love you still; and I will always think kindly of you, though you have nearly broken—my—heart!"

Fresh tears; the sobs grew deeper, as if every thought of him whom she loved so dearly was adding newer weight to this flow of grief.

But, her nature was not all gold alone. There was iron, too, in that affectionate heart; for, soon she checked her weeping, and half-started from her seat.

"I must leave here!" she exclaimed, low and breathless. "I must go *at once*! Oh! it will drive me *mad* to stay where he has been so often. Yes—at once—to-night. Am I turning crazy?—I can't help it! I must go—go away!"

She stole to the door, and, partially opening it, listened there for several seconds.

"Pa has gone to bed. I will not wake him. Then, too, he would not permit my departure. And I must, I *must* go! Another day here would kill me! I will write him a note, and he will not worry. I'll go to Aunt Jane. I *must* leave this place!"

It was a sudden excitement that brought the color back to her white face, and made her grip the pen nervously, as she seated herself at the table to write.

Perhaps she was wrong in doing what she was about to do. But the question of right and wrong was far from her distracted brain, just then.

She only knew that to see about her, as of old, those lovely spots with whose attractions Hugh Winfield was associated, would be a constant gall, a source of never-ending misery to her; for they had roamed together, so often, round the cottage and its adjacent nooks, till *now* every breath would seem to whisper his name, every flower remind her of some speech or action of his.

She must leave the scene of these reminders; and an inward prompting cried:

"At once! At once!"

When the note was finished, she left her room, and crossed the hall.

Slipping the tiny sheet under the door of her father's bedchamber, she returned to her own apartment to prepare hastily for the flight.

It did not take her long to change her attire, adjust the cute hat over the clustering curls, and throw a light shawl over her shoulders.

Then, snatching her little purse from its place in the bureau-drawer, she stole swiftly and noiselessly away.

Down the stairs—feeling, with every step, as if she must cry out the pain caused by her very act; yet on, smothering regrets in her great desire to escape those surroundings which would constantly bring back to memory the man through whose fault she was so utterly despairing.

She had resolved to forget him—not hate, or even blame him; but let him vanish from her mind, as if it were but a waking to sad reality after pleasant dreams.

On the lawn, beside a rose-bush—the very spot on which, that afternoon, she had parted with him, and felt, in the separation, the sweetest hope of her young life fade out—she paused, involuntarily.

In the dim starlight, she gazed around her.

"Good-by! Good-by!" fell from her quivering lips. "Birds, flowers, once-happy life—good-by! Good-by, Hugh!—farewell to my—my mad dream of love! I may find other scenes as beautiful as those around you, dear home—but never, never the joys that have been mine, even in this solitude. There is *no* life sweet as that of the past!—*no* dream so full of gold! Yet I must forget you—forget you all. Dear home—good-by!"

She hurried off down the narrow path, without one look behind, and wiping the tears from her eyes—tears that *would* gush from the weary lids, despite her greatest effort at self-mastery.

Her heart nearly burst, it was so full, as she began to realize what she was doing.

But on, on, without a pause; and soon she was tramping the dusty path on the roadside, turning her steps toward the distant city.

Had Zella but known what a train of events

were to ensue upon this injudicious, yet, to her, necessary flight!

Had she but glanced into her father's room, when she pushed the note beneath the door!

The hour was still and ominous.

Night was slowly melting away in morning.

A solitary figure was walking, weary and timid, along Twenty-first street—a female.

Soon she halted before a private dwelling, and grasped the railing, as if about to ascend the steps; but then she paused, and glanced up at the darkened windows.

"How thoughtless in me!" she exclaimed. "They are all in bed—and I must not wake them. I wouldn't like anybody to wake me up at this hour of the night. And yet I'm so tired, I— Ah!" She turned frightenedly, as the sound of a measured step fell upon her ears.

A policeman was approaching. Already he had seen her; and the watchful guardian of the peace was giving her all the benefit of ready suspicion, as he drew near.

Zella—for it was she—advanced toward him.

"Will you please direct me to a genteel boarding-house?—or a hotel?" she inquired, with some hesitation.

"Boardin'-house?" he repeated, coming to a halt, with some space between them.

"Yes, sir. My aunt lives here, in this house; but I don't like to wake them up. I'm really a stranger in the city so I must appeal to you."

"There's nobody livin' in that house."

"Nobody living here?"

Surely, he could not have mistaken the genuineness of her surprised exclamation.

"No—they went East, yesterday."

"I am glad I know this," said Zella, when she had recovered somewhat from her astonishment. Then, more than ever, must I ask your assistance. Please tell me which way to go, to find rest and sleep for to-night—or until I can make definite arrangements. I've come a long way, and I'm very tired."

He was soon satisfied that he spoke with a lady, and very quickly proceeded to escort her to the desired haven.

Much to her gratification he asked no significant questions.

"I'll go along, miss. You're rather a young girl to be runnin' round at this time o' night. Just step alongside of me—come on."

And as Zella went, she was wondering what she should do on the morrow, since her aunt was out of town, and the house, she knew, was closed.

But the spur to her actions was still sharp; and she hardly allowed the prospect to enter her mind.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

"The fear men feel when shrouded phantoms rise
Came over me and I would fain have fled—
But, that my frame seemed suddenly like lead!"
—DUGANNE.

Two days after Wilbur Kearn's interview with the physician.

Theophilus Onnorann sat at his desk, engaged with a pamphlet on Iodoform.

Directly opposite him, on the other side of the desk, Jimmy Jiggers was scratching away with a noisy pen, on a sheet of foolscap—twisting his head, screwing his lips, and rolling his tongue from side to side across his mouth, as he wrote.

Onnorann was not wholly occupied with the pamphlet. Occasionally he would glance over the top of the page, at Jiggers—a glance that was sly and keen, and of a kind that boded no good to the object of his scrutiny.

And in the physician's mind ran the following:

"What shall I do with him? His curiosity may cause me a serious difficulty yet, if I don't cure him. He has seen the papers—that's unfortunate. It was lucky the girl saw him. I must teach him a lesson, somehow; make him swear never to divulge what he knows—he knows too much, I fear. If he won't swear, or if I thought the idiot would betray me, I'd—but, wait: I'll hit

upon a plan before the day goes by." Then aloud, as he yawned and stretched his arms:

"Ay—ho!"

"Ay—ho!" echoed Jiggers, dismally.

"Jiggers?"

"Um-m-m-ni-m!" scribbling on, with extraordinary rapidity.

"James Jiggers?" hitting the desk a slap with the pamphlet.

"Eh? Oh!—yes, sir."

The tone was so sharp and sudden, that the pen slipped in a broad blot, and the ogle eyes distended as they raised from the sheet.

"Do you want to swallow a dose of fish-hooks?"

"I, good master Doctor?" timidly, and in astonishment.

"Yes, sirrah, you. Didn't you hear me speak?"

"I did not, I vow."

"Haven't I told you never to imitate me?"

"I didn't, good master Doc—"

"You did!"

"Yes—I did!" faltered the other, with a jump.

"See that you don't do it again."

"I won't, I vow."

Onnorann regarded him steadily for a moment; then he arose, and went into a back room.

Jiggers watched him uneasily.

Pretty soon the physician returned, bringing with him a mortar and pestle. In one hand he carried two small papers and a vial. Setting the mortar on the desk, he emptied one of the papers into it, and held the pestle toward his employee.

"Take this."

"I'm afraid."

"Do you hear me?—take it!" threateningly.

"Yes—I will, I will," Jiggers whined.

"Now, mix—pound—mash well."

Jiggers began to mash the stuff in the mortar, and Onnorann dropped in the contents of the second paper.

Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! went the pestle.

The operator began to tremble while he sniffed the air. There arose a peculiar odor in the atmosphere.

"It's smoking," he presently cried. "Look; it'll burst!"

"Go on; go on," ordered Onnorann, sharply.

"It'll burst—I know it will. Look at the smoke!"

Fiz! sputtered the stuff in the mortar.

"Doctor! Doctor!—we shall both be killed!"

"Go on, I say!"

Thump! Thump! Thump! went the pestle again.

The physician now poured in the liquid from the vial.

Instantly a flame shot upward, singeing Jiggers's eyebrows. The pestle dropped; he fell to the floor as if knocked down.

"Good Master Doctor! Lord!—ho-o-o!" a half-scream, half-shout.

While engaged at the mortar, Jiggers did not notice that his employer had washed his face in a dark solution. Now, as he looked up from his recumbent position, he uttered a cry of horror, and shivered as with an ague—for Onnorann's face was black as a cloud at midnight.

"James Jiggers," he said, very solemnly, while the orbs in the green spectacles glittered ominously.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Jiggers, shutting his eyes tightly.

"James Jiggers, you have too much curiosity—"

"No, good Master Doctor, I have none at all!"

"You have, I say!"

"Yes—I have, I have," with a mournful whine.

"I am the devil's deputy, sent to cure you. I must put out your eyes, and carve off your ears! I must vaccinate your nose, and draw out your finger-nails!"

"D-o-n-t!" he screamed.

"You must drink corrosive sublimate, and hang by your heels till your hair grows longer. I must cut off your head and take out your brains—"

Jiggers interrupted him with a howl, and opened his eyes in very terror.

"Lord! Oh! Lord help me!"

"And all because you pryed out what was behind the books on the shelf."

"I'm a dead man!" he wailed, in hopeless despair. "Oh! Oh! good Master Doctor—don't! I'll never have any curiosity any more-e-e!"

His short hair was standing on end; again the eyes closed in a redoubled paroxysm of fright, for the physician stooped down and gripped him by the collar.

"Will you swear, on penalty of being fed to the imps, that you'll never tell anybody what you know?—what you have found out?—what you—" but he paused before he finished, before Jiggers could give vent to the premature declaration of utter silence for the future, which bubbled and gasped from his lips.

There was a heavy footfall in the entry without. Onnorann listened.

Rap! came a summons on the door—a single knock, loud and imperative; and the grip on Jiggers's shoulder tightened.

Between the rap and the grip, the affrighted man jumped; arms, body and crooked limbs all shook simultaneously.

"See who it is," said Onnorann, releasing him.

"I can't get up!"—a shivering whisper. "I'm too weak."

"Get up—if you don't want me to swallow you!"

Jiggers scrambled to his feet, and stood limply on the bow-legs that quaked and bent underneath him, while his face was wrinkled and woful.

"I am going into the back room. Admit whoever it is, and bid them be seated."

Rap! rap! came another summons, this time impatient and quick.

Onnorann hastened into the adjoining room, to wash the stain from his face. Jiggers wriggled unsteadily over to the door, and admitted the comer.

It was Calvert Mandor.

"Where is Doctor Theophilus Onnorann?" he demanded, frowningly.

CHAPTER XIII.

ZELLA'S NEW LIFE.

"Yet for awhile let the bewildered soul
Find in society relief from woe;
Oh, yield awhile to friendship's soft control;
Some respite, friendship, wilt thou not bestow?"
—BEATTIE.

"My life is like the summer rose
That opens on the summer sky,
But ere the shades of evening close
Is scattered on the ground—to die!"
—WILDE.

THE policeman to whom Zella appealed on the night when she came, like a wanderer, into the slumber-locked city had found her a pleasant refuge for the night.

On the morning following she was alone with her meditations in the cozy little room allotted to her use.

The breakfast-tray sat on the small table near her, and Zella, having just arisen from partaking of the tempting meal which the kind hostess had sent up to her, drew a chair to the window, and was looking dreamily out upon the scene that was so different from the fairy visions around her country home.

Not now the heraldic songs of birds and dewy perfumes of the flowers; but the whir and skurry of business and heavy, gloomful atmospheres. Not now the beautiful landscape, with ripening fields, the velvet grass or the cool shadow of verdurous trees; but houses, houses in endless number, smoking chimneys, cramped streets, with their hurrying throngs, and a constant murmuring of noisy airs—all changed, save the still bright blue of the sky and the play of the sunbeams.

Yet, even this monotony, with its adieu to scenes that were full of grandeur and attractiveness was soothing in its way.

She felt as if she would wish to be buried forever there in that silent room and live out her unhappy life in exile.

Hugh was not in her thoughts then, as she listlessly noted the people below; but she was thinking of her father—how she could let him know of her whereabouts?—wondering whether he had found the note explanatory of her absence—and if he was much worried?

"I cannot go back there," she uttered, half-aloud; "it has cost me too great an effort to leave it—and it would make me feel worse. I am safe almost now from everybody. I cannot go back. But pa must know where I am. He will go to Aunt Jane's, and when he finds out that she has gone away and that I could not have seen her, then he will be very anxious about me, I know. How shall I send him word? What shall I do?"

Some one tapped gently on her door.

"Come," said Zella.

It was the landlady—a good-natured female of middle age, with an agreeable countenance.

"Good-morning, miss," as she advanced into the room.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Diggs."

"I just thought I'd come up and see if there's anything else you'd like to have, miss. My boarders're all gone out, and—myhol—it's just a relief to me, you know, for there's just some of the liveliest young larks here you ever *did* see, and they sometimes nigh tease me half out of my wits. But, is there anything else I can send up to you—"

"No, I thank you, Mrs. Diggs! I had a very nice breakfast."

"Yes, miss."

She lingered closer, evidently having something to say, and as evidently reluctant to say it.

"Won't you sit down, Mrs. Diggs?"

"Me?—no, indeed; bless you! I haven't a minute. I've to look after the sweeping and dusting, and things generally—and hired girls need a heap of watching, you know, or they'll burn the cakes, or break the dishes, or sweep the dust under the bed—indeed they will—and—"

"But, you can sit down a little while? I—I feel as if I wanted somebody to talk to, very much. I was thinking when you came in—and my thoughts were quite uncheerful."

"Well, I can't stop long, now," seating herself in a chair near her new boarder. "So you were thinking, eh? Well, I used to do somewhat of it when I was young, like you, but—myhum!—I've been married, you know, and I haven't had much time for poetry since, I tell you, no, indeed."

"Do you think, then, that dream-thoughts vanish when one gets married?" inquired Zella, very lowly.

"Well, rather," replied Mrs. Diggs, with something between a chuckle and a laugh, while she nodded her head wisely.

"And do you think people are unhappy when they get married?" still lower.

"Well, now, I can't say, generally, as to that. Was you ever married, miss?"

"No," said Zella, quickly, and starting at the abrupt question.

"Um! well, you see, I didn't know but what I might, perhaps, hurt your feelings, and that's why I asked. I can tell you *one* thing, though, miss: there's mighty few happy married people nowadays—mighty few. And I wouldn't advise a young girl to be in a hurry about loving any young fellow overmuch, now."

There was a mutual silence.

Then Mrs. Diggs said, with an effort:

"You see, miss, my husband kind of set me going in this business, and—poor soul!—when he died, just two months past, he made me promise to adopt a rule in conducting this boarding-house. It's a good rule, if it *isn't* always convenient. But then, people who don't have rules, you know, have a hard time to get along—"

"What is the rule? Does it apply to your boarders?" asked Zella.

"Yes, miss—"

"Then I'm sure I'll comply. What is it?"

"Well," explained Mrs. Diggs, and she did it slowly, "it's always customary with me to request—mind, I only say to request—that all my boarders pay in advance, you see; and if it's convenient—"

"Why, certainly."

Zella smiled as she drew forth her purse.

"Now mind, miss, I say if it's entirely convenient."

"Of course—as well now as any other time, I guess. What are your terms, Mrs. Diggs?"

"How long are you going to stay?"

Zella did not answer immediately, for it had never occurred to her how long she would remain there. The accommodations suited

her; the house was very genteel, but the questions of time and means had never suggested themselves.

While she hesitated, she was running over the contents of her purse; then, her face became pale, for, contrary to her expectations, the sum she possessed was small—only eleven dollars.

"How much per week, Mrs. Diggs?"

"Will you stop more than one week?"

"I—I hardly know—very likely."

"Well, you see, my house is one of the best—nothing but what's first-class about it. My terms are a dollar a day to men boarders; but I guess you can stop for five dollars a week—that includes washing, you know."

The latter remark reminded Zella that she had not even brought a change of clothing with her. To remedy this condition would require money at once, so that she must husband her resources.

She paid for one week's board in advance.

Then the two entered into conversation, which, though Mrs. Diggs had declared she could not stop a minute, consumed nearly the whole forenoon.

The sun was nigh its meridian when the landlady withdrew, and as she passed along the hall she was saying to herself:

"My! my! what a sad little thing she is; just as pretty as an angel, and as solemn as if she'd lost every friend in the world. And I couldn't find out for the life of me who she is or where she comes from! I'll fix it nice and comfortable for her, sure, for I like her. I do wonder what makes her so sad like."

Mrs. Diggs could not have dreamed how, only a few hours distant in the past, that lovely girl had been the very soul of gayety, with laughing lips, merry eyes, and a heart of gold brimful of hope.

Zella remained at the window, and again busied her mind with trying to devise some scheme for apprising her father of her whereabouts.

While this was perplexing her, a barouche turned the corner above and sped along through the street below her. A liveried driver guided the spirited horses. A beautiful girl and a well-dressed gentleman occupied the back seat.

Involuntarily she took the gay equipage into her listless gaze.

No sooner did she see the face of him who sat beside the young lady, than her eyes widened—the white cheeks grew whiter—she started up and reached her two clasped hands out of the window toward him.

"Oh! Hugh—Hugh!" she cried, "come to me! I am here, Hugh! Come back! come back!"

But the cry was buried in the busy hum and rattle of the wagon-wheels, and the barouche swept on.

She stood there with her hands still clasped pleadingly, and the dark eyes wide and straining as they looked after him.

Then he was lost to view; she sunk back into the chair, her whole form trembling, and the pale face, so full of woe, drooped forward on her arm on the window-sill.

"O—h! Hugh—Hugh! I hoped *never* to see you again. I had hoped I could forget you—forget that I ever loved you so madly! But Heaven is unkind—oh! so unkind, to send you to my eyes this way! Why, why did you drive past there? Why, why did you and I ever come together? I feel as if I—could—die! My heart is breaking!"

As the barouche drove swiftly before the house a man on the opposite side of the street halted suddenly in his rapid walk and stared at the beautiful girl who sat beside Hugh Winfield.

It was Dr. Theophilus Onnorann.

He elevated his nose, adjusted the green glasses, frowned, and muttered:

"Now, bless my spectacles! if that female had dark hair, instead of flaxen, I'd swear it was Zella Kearns. What a resemblance there is, to be sure! and— Ah! eh? why?—well, now!"

He glanced up accidentally at the third story window directly opposite, and beheld the pale, beseeching, tearful face that looked so yearningly after Hugh Winfield.

This time there could be no mistake, and while he wondered, he exclaimed:

"There *is* Zella Kearns, or I'll forfeit my diploma! What's she doing there?"

CHAPTER XIV.

FALSE?—OR FICKLE?

"From lips like those, what precepts failed to move?"
—POPE.

"Away, away, my early dream,
Remembrance never must awake."
—BYRON.

A LARGE, square-built house, with brown-stone steps and doors and windows finished in a corresponding color.

The interior was one of unsurpassed richness—gilt and drapings, mirrors that reflected the gaudy colors of rare carpeting and fanciful ceilings, prisms chandeliers, furniture of satin fringe—everything to speak of wealth and taste set forth in the spacious halls and arched parlors. It was the home of Ilde Wyn, she whose love Hugh Winfield was to reciprocate, and whose money was the object of that reciprocation.

The hour was early evening. Lights burned brilliantly in parlor and bedrooms.

In an apartment in the second story Ilde Wyn reclined on a long, high cushion of costly fabric—a picture of loveliness at ease upon a couch of dreamful luxury.

To describe her, we have but to imagine a counterpart of Zella Kearns. The two were of the same symmetry of form, the same unearthly beauty of face—even in voice there was a likeness. The exceptions were that Ilde was about two years younger—the difference in age not perceptible; her hair was soft and flaxen; her speech was, perhaps, richer with melody, and her manner was more studied, as if her chiefest grace was a cultivation of power.

She was attired in a way to discover all those charms a woman may display with propriety. Her long tresses volumed over shoulders of statue-like purity, and in them mingled the many jewels on her person, like diadems of splendor in a golden mist.

For a long time she had been reading a novel—not attentively, but in a way that indicated a restlessness of spirit and betrayed that it was but an occupation to pass the slow moments.

Soon she started up from the cushion and impatiently tossed the book aside.

"There's no recreation for me in that! Why don't he come! surely, it is time." And the daintily-slippered feet began to tread to and fro on the yielding carpet.

"So he is coming at last?" she broke forth meditatively, while a smile that was sweet, even in its expression of triumph, wreathed her lips.

"At last he will be with me—and alone—the man I am worshiping, and to gain whose love I could almost be guilty of the most heinous of crimes! Oh! how I love him. Can I succeed?—Will he yield?—Will he love as I love—is he heart-free? It is strange that I should have conceived so great a passion for a man with whom I have never exchanged a word. But the hour is here! Father and son both hate me, because of what rumor has said—a rumor half-true. Ha! ha! what of it? Yet they smother that hate to save themselves from ruin. Well, be it so; let them take my money—all of it—every cent. It is *nothing* to lose if I win the love I seek. Yes, take it, Cyrus Winfield—but give me the price of my sacrifice. Take all I have, but give me in return Hugh's love— Ah!"

The clang of the door-bell, the sound of feet hastening to answer the summons.

Ilde listened eagerly. The smile on her face deepened with its combined expressions of pleasure and prospective triumph.

The comer was Hugh Winfield.

He was ushered into her presence, and formality was at once set aside by her cordial greeting.

"Mr. Winfield, I am very, very glad to see you."

She advanced with both hands outstretched, and he took them almost involuntarily in his own, while he gazed into the beautiful face.

Her resemblance to Zella at once struck him—and here eyes—those large, lustrous orbs, brilliant as two starry gems—seemed to hold him spellbound.

"Miss Wyn," was all he said, scarcely bowing over the warm, white hands he clasped.

"I ought to feel honored by this call, Mr. Winfield," continued the beauty, smiling.

"It is the first visit I have received from any one in 'society.'"

The remark slightly embarrassed him; the blood began to mount in his face. But she immediately relieved him with:

"Come—do not let us be new acquaintances, but old friends at once. You see there are no chairs in this room, but cushions—sit on this one, beside me. They are admirable for *tete-a-tetes*."

She led him to the cushion on which she had been reclining a few moments previous.

He was watching her fixedly still. Those bright eyes were strangely familiar to him; they contained a something that reminded him of a past impression.

"The outside world does not think well of Ilde Wyn—does it, Mr. Winfield?"

"The world is not always just in its opinions," he answered. "Moreover it's far from being consistent. One moment it reviles, and the next it is lauding. It cultivates slander and praise, alternately, and is as often wrong in one as in the other. Communities, like the grass of the wilderness, are full of snakes, and vile tongues do not lack supporters."

"And you, Mr. Winfield—do I look like one who deserves all the ill that has been said against me?"

"Rumor gets no encouragement from me, Miss Wyn."

"I have been a victim to some of the most slanderous gossip ever invented," said Ilde, with a tinge of sadness in her voice. "Surely, I never harmed anybody—that I should merit their abuse. Why it is that people will not extend to me their friendship, I do not know. For once, I have proved the inadequacy of wealth alone."

"And do you grieve much?"

"I cannot help feeling that my life is an incomplete existence."

"Luxury, then, lacks perfection."

"It does, Mr. Winfield—it does. Were I a man, I would not care. I could go out among men and force, at least, that courtesy which men exercise toward the superiority of another in financial circles. Even such a recognition would be a relief. But I am a helpless girl, as it were, with no strong arm to protect, no counselor to turn to, no companion to—why, I never knew the love of an honest friend; then can you wonder that I sometimes feel lonely, sometimes almost wish I never had been born?"

There were two great influences already beginning to work within him: the girl's beauty of face and form was not without its effect—her resemblance to Zella, while it could but recall to his mind the gem he had won and cast away, served, in a way, to draw him toward her, until he found himself seized with an admiration akin to love.

As he listened to her rich, bird-like voice, too, with its soft protestations against the treatment she received at the hands of "society," he felt that she was a victim to the malicious envy of belles less attractive than she—and that "society" was but a name, with better, truer, lovelier women outside the cramped boundaries of its stilted limits than ever reigned within.

An hour passed. Their conversation had been full of life and the ardor of his increasing depth of feeling.

It was not, to him, as if the acquaintance had been but recently formed; it seemed that he must have known her for years, and had, until this moment, withstood her charms.

She had watched him closely throughout; quick to perceive, with the keenness of an absorbing love, she saw that her triumph was approaching.

"Miss Wyn—"

"Why not call me Ilde? Surely, we know each other well enough."

There was a strange magnetism in the starry orbs for Hugh, as he returned their steady gaze, felt the blood warming in his veins, and partook of the emotion which now was causing Ilde's full bosom to heave and her sweet breath to fan upon his face as he drew nigher.

"Ilde—"

"Yes—call me Ilde."

"Ilde Wyn"—the words came quick and his cheeks flushed as the mastering fires burned fiercer and fiercer in his captive soul; "this has been a short friendship—very short. But it is not the first time that love

has asserted its supremacy with overwhelming suddenness—ay, I mean it: I say *love*! Stop! hear me," catching the white hands and holding them in a burning clasp; "I am loving you, Ilde Wyn! I am laying my heart at your feet! Will you spurn me? Tell me—can I win *your* love?"

The beautiful face was glowing; the dark eyes that met his eager, pleading look were lighted with an unearthly brilliancy.

He knew not what glad, ecstatic thrills pervaded her every nerve as she drank in the passionate avowal; yet he could not help but see in her face, her eyes, the whispering, wordless motion of the red, ripe lips, that there were responsive fires there as wild, as responsive as his own, a love that needed but the murmur of the voice to make him certain.

It was her triumph!

And Zella was far, far from his thoughts then, in this new, irresistible flame which made him the very slave of her who, till now, he had believed it would be impossible to even tolerate.

Ah! fickle, fickle man!

CHAPTER XV.

THE REAL APPARITION.

"It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching heart."
—CONGREVE.

"If there be cords, or knives,
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,
I'll not endure it."
—SHAKESPEARE.

THOUGH Calvert Mandor's face, when he entered Onnorann's office, was stern and frowning—though his bearing and accent betrayed that he was there on no pleasant business, still the intrusion was a relief to Jiggers. He felt that, in the presence of a third party, he was free for a time from the torments his employer was wont to practice upon him.

He bowed, he grinned, he endeavored to smooth his standing bristles of hair—pushed forward a chair, and squirmed around in an attentive manner.

"Where is Doctor Theophilus Onnorann?"

"Yes, sir—that is, he'll be here in a moment, sir. Be seated, please," wheeling the chair closer and bending and wriggling anew.

"Is Doctor Theophilus Onnorann out?" interrogated Mandor, seating himself.

"No, sir, he—"

"Then where is he?" an interruption so quick and sharp that the ogle eyes gave a twitch, and Jiggers drew a short breath as he hastened to say:

"He's just stepped into the next room. He'll be here directly—yes."

"In the next room?"

"Yes, sir; he'll be here direct—"

"Go and call him."

"Eh?—"

"Call him, I say."

"If I do, may I be hanged!" exclaimed Jiggers, mentally. "He's told me never to go near that room, on penalty of being dissected. Yours truly—but I can't do any such thing, *much*." Then aloud, as Onnorann appeared, with his face entirely cleaned of the black stain: "Here he is now, sir!"

The visitor sat with his back toward the door through which the physician entered. The latter did not observe his features as he advanced, saying:

"Ah! good-day, sir. Glad to see you, sir. You wish to consult with me? I—H-a! God!"

Mandor had risen suddenly, and turned upon him.

After one brief glance at the man before him, Onnorann staggered backward with a sharp cry.

"Wonderful!" spurted Jiggers, as he gaped and stared from one to the other of the two men who formed a striking tableau.

"Calvert Mandor!—*alive*!"

"Calvert Mandor!—*alive*!" echoed Jimmy. "My!"

Mandor gazed steadily into the face of the physician, who cowered against the wall, and he smiled—a sneering, contemptuous, ironical smile.

"Yes, Theophilus Onnorann, I am alive. Strange, is it not?"

"The dead from the grave!" whispered Onnorann, huskily.

"From the grave! My!" echoed Jiggers again.

"No"—advancing a step—"not from the grave, for your little plot failed. When you saw me mounted on a horse that you knew was trickish and treacherous, you were filled with a devilish joy, no doubt, for you counted, in that ride, on my death. Your calculations were pretty near right, but I survived, you see. Nineteen years have not altered me much, eh? You knew me immediately."

During Mandor's brief, significant speech the physician recovered from the effect of this unexpected meeting.

He was a man of nerve, and not one to be long without his composure, even in a case of this kind, where the appearance of a man he had thought dead, and on whose death he had built many plans, threatened a more than ordinary peril and caused him a peculiar restlessness of mind.

His recovery was as sudden and complete as his surprise had been.

It must have cost him an effort few men are capable of making, for, in a second, he was calm, his voice was without a waver, he even smiled as he rubbed his skinny hands slowly together and said:

"I am glad, I am very glad, indeed, that you were not killed. It seems miraculous! But where have you been so long? My dear sir, you disappeared quick as a spirit down a trap-door on the stage! It's been—let me see—yes—nineteen years; quite a while. We searched for you, high and low; but you'd vanished. Sit down, and tell me all about it. It's wonderful."

"Astonishing!" supplemented Jiggers, still gaping.

"James Jiggers!" threateningly.

"Yes, sir—I won't speak again, I vow," sliding away before the dark look.

"Sit down," said the physician, appropriating a chair himself, and motioning Mandor to do likewise.

The other was rather balked by Onnorann's quiet, collected carriage.

But Jiggers saw that his employer's front was merely one assumed to meet some impending crisis; more, he perceived that the frown on Mandor's brow was gathering darkness; finally, he apprehended a collision between the two men, and inched nearer to the door, that he might be able to dash out at the first physical demonstration of hostility.

And the ogle eyes turned and circled uneasily; the small, sharp eyes in the green spectacles were glistening, scintillating, fastening themselves on the visitor; Calvert Mandor regarded the physician in silence, as if undecided how to impierce that individual's nonchalance.

But Calvert Mandor was not in a frame of mind to be wholly disconcerted by the physician's quiet exterior and bland ways. He soon saw through this garb of calmness; and he said, when he caught the other's glittering eyes, and held them to his gaze:

"Always a hypocrite, Theophilus Onnorann, you think to deceive me now. You are hating me more and more—you hated me even when you thought me dead!—you have hated me ever since we played together on the same school-ground, where I was more of a favorite than you."

And Onnorann said to himself:

"You are right. This minute I could throttle you where you stand! Now, what is the object of this visit, I wonder?"

As if in answer to the doctor's mental question, Mandor continued:

"Theophilus Onnorann, nineteen years ago it was supposed that I died."

Onnorann nodded.

"I left a wife and child," pausing again.

"I believe you did."

"My wife, under the impression that she was a widow, married Wilbur Kearn."

"Yes, she soon forgot you," commented the physician, maliciously.

Mandor's face colored, but, without remark upon this sharp thrust, he went on:

"I know that my wife married. But I do not know what became of my child."

"A-h!" exclaimed the other, in a slow tone, and he added, inwardly.

"Now then, I've got you, friend Mandor. Your soft spot is bare," and he eyed his visitor with newer keenness.

"I know that Wilbur Kearn had a child; but, from inquiry made in his neighborhood, yesterday, I learn that he has but one child, that that child is by his wife, and his own. Now, where is my child?"

"Yours—"

"Yes, mine. You have spirited away his—perhaps you can tell me where to look for mine?"

"Spirited away—"

"Ay, I have you. I said it, and it is true. I am convinced that you can tell me what became of Zella Mandor, after my wife married Wilbur Kearn."

"Oho!" thought the doctor, scarce able to restrain a chuckle, "here is a little intricacy between this man from the grave and Kearn. His daughter, eh? He and Kearn must not meet, or the secret will be out. Now, what if he knew that— But let us see, friend Mandor. Aha! we'll see about it."

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Eh?—oh, yes—I heard. But you are very much mistaken. I know nothing at all about your Zella."

"You do—"

"Pardon me, friend Mandor, but I do not."

Darker grew the frown on Mandor's brow. Onnorann did not like that frown, and his own brow knit slightly:

Jiggers drew closer to the door.

"Theophilus Onnorann, I cannot account for it, but something here"—tapping his breast—"tells me that you hold the secret of Zella's whereabouts at your tongue's end—"

"Do not excite yourself," a cool interruption, with a wave of the hand.

But Mandor was breathing hard. The physician's manner pricked his patience till calmness was lost. He took a quick step forward and spoke heatedly:

"I have come here to wring the information from your lips—by force, if necessary; and all your hypocrisy will not avail you anything. I am determined; and tell me you *shall*, if these hands have to choke it from you! And if I fail, there is another who may deal more sternly with you."

The eyes in the spectacles closed a little, but the glitter and sparkle beneath the lids was redoubled, and the glance was hard and steady.

Jiggers now laid hold upon the door-knob, and half turned it. His ogle eyes opened wider, his knees bent some, and while he gaped at them he muttered:

"Now they'll fight—and then I'm off! I'll bet on the doctor, for he has a grip like a giant, I vow!"

"Besides," added Mandor, flushing more and more, as he warmed to the business in mind, "I made a will, just before that fatal ride on horseback—and it has never come to light, for my estates are idle. I believe you know something of this, too. We'll speak of that presently. But first, my child—Zella—tell me, before I have recourse to sterner means."

"No, we *won't* speak of that presently!" resolved the physician, in his alert brain. "If I allow you to keep at it, my fine friend, you promise to make it hot as Mercury for me in rather too short a time! You've come on a dangerous errand. You've put your foot in a trap that will snap you in a minute. Look out now, for I intend to show you something."

He was as slow and calculating in thought as he was in speech.

Then aloud:

"Friend Mandor, you have always considered me your enemy—"

"You are now—you ever will be. You are still the snake you have been in the past—you will always be a snake, a serpent of venom, till you die. But, sir, I have you pinned—for you may not leave this room alive, unless you answer my question, and answer truthfully—"

"Easy—easy," the interruption was very oily. "I may not be so set an enemy as you think. In short, I shall prove to you that I am a friend—"

"A friend!" with sarcasm.

"By giving you the information you seek."

"Ha!"—a quick, half-breathless exclamation—"you *do* know!"

"Yes."

"Then tell me, sir; and make haste—"

"Easy now, I say. It involves a long story."

"I care not for the story—tell me where Zella is."

"You are too im-pa-tient. I cannot tell you exactly where to find her, but I can relate certain circumstances regarding her which will put you on the track—and I have no doubt you will soon find her. We are liable to interruption here, though; just step into the next room with me."

He was exceedingly pleasant; his manner was persuasive.

He arose and started toward the door of the room adjoining.

But Mandor was suspicious.

"You are a shrewd, plotting villain, Theophilus Onnorann, and—"

"Eh?—that's a hard term—take care!" finishing however, with an immediate recovery of calmness. "If I were you, friend Mandor, I would not indulge in such free opinions. Remember, please, that you are the beggar in this instance, and"—with marked emphasis, though his voice sunk even lower—"if you anger me, I shall tell you nothing, be the consequences what they may. All the remarkable choking you have promised me wouldn't do *you* any good. Will you come?—I will not speak on the subject unless it be in that room."

Onnorann pointed carelessly toward the apartment, and his manner plainly conveyed:

"Choose for yourself; I care not."

"How do I know but what there is some trick?"

"If there is, we are simply man to man. Do you fear me, physically?"

"Fear you?"—his lip curling—"I despise you too greatly to admit of fear."

Onnorann was nettled; he was sorely tempted to throw down the gauntlet and accept the risk; his eyes were full of a serpent fire.

But he had formed a little plot to rid himself of this dangerous comer, and so controlled his impulses, for he foresaw that he would soon triumph.

"I carry no weapons, friend Mandor, so you need not fear on that score. If you decline to trust yourself alone with me, so be it—and there it ends."

He made a movement as if to resume his seat.

"Stay; I will go. Lead on."

"Come, then."

Jiggers looked after the two, and exclaimed, *sotto voce*:

"He's a dead man! He'll be on the dissecting-table in half an hour! A bottle of whisky against a doughnut that he never comes out of there!"

And he was not far from being right.

There was but one chair in the apartment to which Onnorann conducted his intended victim. While he remarked it, he said:

"Sit down. I'll get another."

He turned to the door, and stepped suddenly into his office.

Jiggers, yielding to his bent of curiosity, was already at the keyhole, and the physician collided with him—sending him sprawling.

"James Jiggers!"

"I'll never do it again, I vow!" sputtered Jiggers, as he hurriedly gathered himself up, and wriggled beyond reach of his employer's clinched fist.

But Onnorann had an object in leaving his visitor alone.

While he spoke sharply to his clerk, he was pressing with his foot on a spring just at the surface of the floor-strip across the doorway.

Suddenly there was a sliding, grating sound—a crash—a loud cry; then followed silence.

The physician grinned.

Jiggers rolled his eyes.

"James Jiggers."

"Yes, sir," tremblingly, for he felt that something had happened, and he shrunk in fear and awe before his employer's strangeness of expression.

"Look!" said Onnorann, in a voice of triumph, as he flung wide the door.

Jiggers stared ahead.

Calvert Mandor had disappeared; in the center of the room, where the chair had stood, was a large, square opening.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO LOVES FOR ONE HEART.

"I love thee!—Oh, the strife, the pain,
The fiery thoughts that through me roll!"
—CORNWALL.

"Fond memory whispers o' the dreamy past,
Its hopes and joys, its agony and tears;
In vain from out his soul he strives to cast
One shadowy form—the love of early years."
—LAWSON.

Nor must we blame Hugh Winfield too much for yielding to this new love, when the voice, the person, the glance of Ilde Wyn were all in sweetness made to captivate, and used to enslave his heart.

For man is, after all, but a mere subject under the control of two great and distinct powers always and essentially material—animal susceptibility, and intellectual prompting; and the varying predominancy of either, in opposite proportion, is what creates differences in human nature, and produces the inconsistencies, as well as the beauties, of life.

Hugh was not proof against her rare charms; and, besides, he was full of sympathy for her, in her lonely existence.

At the moment he made the warm confession he was sincere, his whole being was absorbed in the new-born passion; his voice was rich with eloquence, his words were quick and eager.

"Hugh Winfield, *do* you love me?"

The question came very low, the brilliant orbs were fastened to his gaze, her heart beat fast with growing excitement.

"Yes, Ilde, I do. I can say no more. My heart is at your feet—will you spurn it?"

"No, Hugh—no, I will not!"

With a quick motion, the dimpled arms entwined his neck, and the lovely face, glowing crimson, turned up to his.

It was the action of a woman who knows no law but the inclination of an intense passion.

"For I love you, Hugh—love you wildly! I have loved you long before we ever came face to face. See: I forget, almost, that I am a woman; it is I who talk of love, now. Can you doubt me?—Hugh!"

"Ilde! Queen!"

The sweet mouth was close to his; her breath played upon his cheek.

In another moment they were lip to lip, and locked in the first embrace of their mutually-confessed love.

"Hugh, are you sure you know your heart?"

"What do you mean, Ilde?"

"Oh! do not tell me that you love me, unless you mean it—"

"Can words say more? Would I hold you in my arms, and see those blushes on your cheeks, if I was not sincere? We have sealed our vows. You are mine."

"Yours, Hugh," she breathed, whisperingly.

An hour, two hours, passed like so many minutes.

In that time the future was arranged for. When he arose, at last, to depart, she accompanied him to the hall.

"Will you come to-morrow, Hugh?"

"Yes."

"At eleven in the morning? We'll ride out together."

"I will come. Good-by, Ilde."

Another kiss, an embrace that it would seem they were loth to break, and he left her.

Those beautiful features, with their cheeks of blush and eyes like lustering diamonds, were twice beautiful, as she watched after him.

When he disappeared down the stairway, she turned back to the room, and an exclamation of joy escaped her.

"Mine!—mine!—mine! He loves me, and has told me so! In a fortnight we shall be married. Oh! is not this a happy hour for me?" and a sweet, glad smile dwelt on the red lips, the bliss of whose kisses Hugh had drank.

Hugh Winfield passed along the lower entry to the front door. The ever-present servant there bowed him out.

As he hastened in the direction of his home, a new feeling took possession of him.

No glad words came from his lips, for conscience was at work, weaving its censures, now that he was away from the object of his

suddenly-conceived affection, beyond the spell of her witchery.

He walked with head hung, and before him slowly arose a vision of Zella Kearn.

Gradually this picture of the brain intensified; he saw himself standing on the little lawn, lingering in the embrace of the pure girl whose deep, deep love he had slighted—slighted, too, when it caused him so much agony of spirit, and when he knew that his heart was wholly hers.

Ilde faded from his mind; he yielded to that memory of the past.

It sunk sterner and sterner into his breast; he could see again the sad, hopeless face that had nestled, with the first pang of despair, against his shoulder—all the misery of that moment was being rewrought; and his frame writhed under the influence of a nameless excitement, till it was unbearable.

"This is madness!" he cried, chokingly, as he roused himself with a mighty effort. "Zella! Zella! I must forget you—forget that I ever saw you! Oh! my brain!—how it burns!—how it whirls and pains! I must forget, or thoughts of her—poor, wronged girl!—will drive me crazy!"

"Heh! Hello, here!"

Hugh, rapt in his uneasy musings, had collided with a party who was hurrying in an opposite direction.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I—"

"Why, Hugh!"

"George!"

It was the very same friend who had advised Hugh Winfield to the course he was at present pursuing.

"What's the matter, old boy?—lost your eyes?"

"I—was thinking. I didn't see anybody."

"Where 've you been?"

"To see Ilde Wyn," after a second's hesitation.

"Have eh?" smiling. "Then I'll wager a basket of champagne that you're in love with her—no offense, you know. But tell me, isn't it so?"

"Yes, George, it is—"

"I knew it!"

"But," interrupted Hugh, while he grasped his friend's wrist, and gazed hard and strangely into his face, "let me tell you something that you do not know. I feel as if I was going mad! Do you hear, George?—mad! Do you know what it is for a heart like mine to be in such a state?—we have been brothers, and you should. I am worshipping that pure, true girl, who, only a few short hours ago, laid bare to me the holiest secret of her soul—"

"Who—Zella?"

"Yes—yes; she told me she loved me. Oh, Heaven! the woe of that meeting—"

"I told you you'd better not go near her," put in George, frowning a little.

"I have parted with her, perhaps—and it were better so—forever. I have cast aside the rarest gem of earth—a woman's first and boundless love; and thoughts of her are burning in my brain, till I am giddy with torture! Stop; hear more. This night I have yielded to the fascinations of one very like Zella—oh! so like her; and we are betrothed. Do you hear me, George?—betrothed! Can I ever be happy? What is to be the end of it? Pity me!—pity me! for I feel that death would be preferable to such pain!"

His voice was tremulous with emotion; his speech was husky; the eyes, that stared into the listener's face, were strained and of an unnatural expression; the grip on the other's wrist tightened convulsively.

And this old, tried friend, as he gave ear to the outburst, saw that Hugh was preyed upon beyond endurance by his unhappy condition.

"Try and calm yourself, my dear fellow," he said, gently. "I am very sorry for this—very. Come home with me. Let's have a talk about it. Maybe I can cheer you a little, anyhow, by conversation. You need companionship—"

"No—good-night, George," and with the hasty words, he wheeled abruptly from the spot.

His friend endeavored to detain him; but Hugh strode on, with compressed lips, striving, with all his manhood, to force back and smother the groan that was rising within him.

"Poor fellow!" uttered George Drake, remaining where they had stood, and looking after the retreating form, "I am very sorry for him. I wish I could make him feel better, but I can't. I once loved, and lost my idol in the grave. My grief was different from his—but the pain was as keen; and I know that, when the heart is crushed in such a case as this, the voice of one's dearest friend is powerless to cheer. Poor fellow—poor fellow," and he turned away, sincerely pitying his half-distracted friend.

CHAPTER XVII.

"ADIEU, OLD LIFE!"

"A cold, gray sky o'erhung with clouds—"

* * * * *
How like the moral atmosphere
Whose gloom my horoscope has made!"

—LONDON.

"I am giddy; expectation whirls me round,
The imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense."

—SHAKESPEARE.

UPON reaching his home, Hugh Winfield met his father in the hall.

As in the afternoon, Cyrus detained him.

The aged face was eager, anxious, half hopeful in expression; his voice was uneven and quick as he addressed his son.

"Well, Hugh?—well? Is it over, eh? You've fixed it? Speak—tell me: you saw Ilde?"

"Yes, father, I saw her."

The young man was very pale; he regarded the other piercingly, while he thought:

"He thinks not of my misery. He reckons nothing but the importance of my successful wooing. Oh! did he but know!—could he but dream of what this thing is costing me!"

Under ordinary circumstances, Cyrus would have readily perceived the great change that had come over his son during the last twenty-four hours.

But now his every thought was absorbed, his whole mind racked, by the crisis that hovered in this particular date of his life. He saw nothing, could speak of nothing, except the part Hugh was to play in this moment of financial peril; and his eyes were wide and starting, as he asked:

"And, Hugh, what is the result?—the result, boy? Speak out!—haste! Am I to sink?—or am I saved? My fate?—quick!"

His breath was coming fast, his mien was wild and trembling.

"Saved," replied Hugh, scarce above a whisper, and still regarding that white, imploring face.

"Saved!" he cried, the influence of a sudden joy breaking upon him. "Saved, you say? Boy!—boy! be careful; do not trifle. I—I am nearly maddened by suspense! I couldn't bear to be deceived. Are you sure? Say it again. Saved? No?—Yes! Hugh—"

"You are saved. Ilde will be my wife within a fortnight."

The announcement was huskily made; yet even this—so openly evident of some great, gnawing emotion—escaped the notice of the excited man.

Cyrus looked hard at him. A strange, unnatural smile wreathed his lips; he tried to speak, but the words bubbled forth in an incoherent murmur.

Then he laughed—it was loud and grating—and staggered dizzily, throwing his arms aloft.

The relief, the joy, after such intense uncertainty, was a relaxation too sudden for the aged frame.

"Help, here!" called Hugh, as he sprang forward and caught the falling form, "help—some one! here!"

A couple of servants came running at his call.

With their assistance Cyrus was borne upstairs, and placed upon his bed.

"Hugh, what is it? What has happened?" Mrs. Winfield, frightened and nervous, was at his side.

But she saw that her husband had only fainted, and promptly began to bathe his pallid brow.

"He was excited, mother, and the news I brought was what caused it."

"What have you done, Hugh? What

was the news?" she inquired, low and hesitating.

"I have saved him from ruin—there, there, mother, do not shed tears—it is no matter. I am wretched, it is true. But I can be a man, I— There, now, do not worry about me."

He kissed her tenderly, and noiselessly withdrew.

When her son was gone, Mrs. Winfield bowed her head to her hands, and tears, such as only a mother can shed for a child, gushed from her weeping eyes—a warm dew of sympathy, with all its bitterness.

Composing herself, after a few moments, when her lover had gone, Ilde Wyn stepped across the road and pulled a bell-rope.

"Have they come yet?" she asked of the servant who answered the summons.

"Yes, Miss Wyn, they're in the basement-room. They were here some time ago; but as you said you wouldn't be intruded upon, I didn't bring them up—"

"I will see them now," interrupted Ilde.

"Make haste."

"Yes, miss."

Ilde turned to a large cushion-covered and cloth-cased chest, that stood at one side of the apartment, and, raising the lid, she gazed down with sparkling eyes upon the contents.

"Wealth! wealth! glittering wealth!" she murmured. "Enough here to enrich every beggar on the streets of St. Louis. It will no longer be my delight to look upon you—pretty things, you are. I have a plenty without you, ay, sufficient to make Hugh and I happy for the rest of our lives."

While thus musing, the door opened, and two men entered.

Ferry and Neol!

"Queen Ruby, we are here," said the first, advancing respectfully.

She smiled upon them and motioned them forward.

"Perry—Neol—see: here is what I promised you."

They glanced down into the chest, and a simultaneous exclamation escaped them.

It was a rich sight: money in notes and coin, and rare gems that sparkled and shone till they dazzled the eye.

"Enough to carry us thrice around the world, and build a palace for each!" cried Perry, in rapture.

"Glorious!" supplemented Neol.

"You have served me long and well," continued Ilde, "and we have all acquired much in a way that the world must never know. But henceforth Queen Ruby must be no more—her name must perish as if it were buried in a grave. To-night we part. Remember, you two are to live as brothers, sharing equally what you have, and abandoning old practices. This is your oath?"

"Yes."

"You are never to address me, by word or note—never recognize me, even by a sign, when we meet. Is not this our bargain?"

"It is," they answered.

"Then, there is its price. Take what is yours."

"What shall we say to Big Dan?" Perry asked.

"Tell him to come to me to-morrow night."

She took the hand of each.

Then they shouldered the chest, and moved toward the door.

"Farewell, Queen Ruby—we wish you happiness," said Perry, as they paused for a moment; and Neol echoed:

"Farewell."

"Perry—Neol—farewell!" waving her hand in adieu.

She listened to their retreating footsteps, growing fainter and fainter on the stairs—and presently there was a sound of wagon-wheels at the rear of the house.

Then the lovely head sunk forward, and she murmured lowly:

"Adieu—the only associates I ever had; robbers, thieves—yet true as steel, and idolizing me, their Queen. Adieu, old life—adieu! you have been full of dangers—but you have brought me my riches, and brought me one whom I love. Queen Ruby is no more—but Ilde Wyn—and then the wife of Hugh! Welcome to the new life—welcome. At last, at last I am happy!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BIG DAN AROUSED.

"Ha! there he goes! A bitter curse go with him,
A scathing curse!" —COLERIDGE.

The smile on the doctor's face was grim. Jiggers stared in amaze.

"My! What have you done?" stammered the latter.

"Sent him to the rats!" hissed Onnorann; and then he turned toward the trap, leaving Jiggers still gasping, staring, astonished.

"Aha!" he muttered as he gazed down into the murky hole, and his eyes fairly danced behind the spectacles "so you'll find out about your daughter, eh?—even if you have to choke me some! Pleasant, indeed—very pleasant. And you'll speak 'presently' of the will you made, eh? Maybe so. You were rash, friend Mandor. You should have known better. What?—I give up the prospect that has fed fat my old hate for so long? Hardly! Tell you where Zella Mandor is? Why should I? What a pity you were not killed that day you rode the mettlesome steed whose sole ambition was to break the bones of every one who mounted him!—a great pity; for then I would have been saved this trouble—*hark!*" He ceased suddenly, and listened, in silence, for several seconds.

"I thought I heard a groan? No matter—it was fancy."

"What's down there, good master doctor?"

James Jiggers, impelled by curiosity, beyond the restraint of fear, had ventured in on tiptoe and he craned his neck to look down into the depths of darkness.

Onnorann eyed him fixedly,

"Rats!" was the brief answer.

"Oh, my!"

"And skeletons!"

"My!"

"Snakes—lizards—bugs—worms—insects—ghosts—goblins!"

"O-h!" Jiggers looked at him in a frightened way, and quickly drew back, as if he dreaded an apparition of all the horrible contents his employer was enumerating.

"Underneath us," exclaimed the doctor, "is a room, bricked up, separate from the rest of the house. It has no floor, and below it is a damp, grave-like cellar—a clear fall of thirty feet."

The ogle eyes twitched; the jaw fell lower.

"There's where I've sent him to," finished Onnorann.

"And can't he get out?" inquired Jiggers, scarce above a whisper.

"Not an outlet, save a long hole that leads to the Biddle street sewer—there's where the rats come from."

"My!"

"How would you like to be put down there?"

Jiggers sidled away, and his heart began to thump.

"James—" awfully sepulchral, "you've got to go down."

"Eh? I, good master doctor?" with a gasp and a whine.

"Yes. You know too much."

"Good master doctor, I know nothing at all."

"You do!" sharply.

"Yes—I do, I do. Oh, Lord! D-d-don't put me down there!"

"Will you swear never to tell what you know, or what you have seen?"

"I'll never tell, I vow!"

"Remember—" taking a quick step forward, which so startled Jiggers, that he dropped to his knees, and clapped his hands; "if you even hint, I'll catch you, wherever you are—"

"I know you will; I know you will, good master."

"I'll pursue you, on wings, through the air—or dive through the earth after you. I'll be sure to be after you; and, if you breathe a word, I'll scrape your flesh from your bones, and boil your skeleton in a soup for the devil."

"Oh, Lord!" with a groan.

"Now, go back to your desk and finish your work."

"I will—I will." He hastily scrambled

to his feet, and wriggled over to his seat at the desk.

And while he scratched away on the paper, with a trembling hand, he was saying, within:

"Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Why did I ever fall into his clutches? He'll devour me some day—I know he will. I'll be killed, and nobody will ever know what became of me! Oh, my! Oh, my!"

Onnorann watched him for a few moments; then he turned again to the hole.

"Now, friend Mandor, I'll adjust your skylight. Sorry to deprive you of ventilation—very."

After listening once more, trying, thereby, to ascertain whether or not the fall had killed his enemy, he drew up the trap-door, by means of a string that was attached to one corner of it, and fastened to a ring just beneath the floor.

The thing shut with a click that told of a strong spring; and when he arose from his kneeling posture, he felt sure that there was no further danger to be apprehended from that source.

"James Jiggers?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am going out."

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Jiggers, in his heart; but he said, aloud, simply: "Yes, sir."

The doctor took up his hat and left the house.

He was highly jubilant over his clever disposal of Mandor.

He adjusted his spectacles anew, slapped on the hat with considerable force, and stepped lightly along the street.

"He's going to see his patients," thought Jiggers, when the door closed after his employer; "and he'll kill them all—I know he will. He'll kill *me*, some day. Oh, my!—I wish he'd let me lay in the gutter, I do, indeed. I'd rather have died there than live this way. And that man down the hole! I sha'n't sleep a wink to night, I know I sha'n't. His ghost will be walking around the house as soon as the clock strikes twelve! Oh, my! Oh, my! Oh, my!—what's that?—nothing. I feel real cold. I wish I'd never been born at all—I do, indeed. And it's Calvert Mandor, too!—whose will I saw behind the books. And I heard the doctor say he'd forged a copy of it, for his own good. My! my!—what shall I do? I want to do so much, and I'm weak as a cat and scared to death. Courage Jiggers, courage!"

While he scribbled away at the MS., he bestowed an occasional glance on the knob of the door that led to the adjoining room, as if momentarily expecting to see it turn, and the ghost of Onnorann's victim stalk in. And, anon, he would draw the small flask from his pocket, and take long drinks at the "courage" it contained—till the words he wrote began to look blurred, and his eyes became sleepy, and the ball-like head bobbed with a suspicious unsteadiness.

Theophilus Onnorann had several calls to make, and his pace was brisk as he started on his professional round.

At the first corner, he noticed a man of gigantic build, bristling countenance and scowling brow. This man saw him coming, and watched him covertly.

But the physician only bestowed a casual glance upon him and continued on.

The man on the corner was Dan Cassar.

He looked after Onnorann with a keen, sharp gaze, and muttered, between his thick lips:

"That 'ere's singular. Where's Mandor? I seen 'im go inter that feller's office, awhile gone—but, he ain't come out yet. Tha' 'ere chap's a mean old flunk—up to all sorts o' badness—cuss 'im. An' now I won'er if he's done anything to shet Mandor up—eh? He looks kinder pleased. I don't like it altogether, 'cause he oughter look jest t'other way—skeered—seein' as he thought Cal Mandor was dead. Now, shall I wait, or shall I go after Cal?"

The physician passed out of sight, while Big Dan was soliloquizing.

The giant presently seemed determined upon a course of action; for, while he shook his head dubiously, he wheeled about, and started in the direction of Onnorann's office.

CHAPTER XIX.

ZELLA HAS A VISITOR.

'And if now the skies look black,
All the past behind my back
Is a bright and blessed track;
Never mind!

Be then tranquil as a dove;
Through these thunder-clouds above
Shines afar the heaven of love;
Never mind!"

—TUPPER.

As Theophilus Onnorann hurried through a street not far from his own residence, his attention was attracted by a barouche that came swiftly along, with spirited horses chafing under a tight rein.

It was the one containing Hugh Winfield and Ilde Wynn.

We have seen that the doctor was immediately struck with Ilde's resemblance to Zella Kern, and also that he discovered Zella by an accidental glance up at the third-story windows of the house directly opposite.

While considering what she could be doing there, he almost involuntarily crossed over and pulled the door-bell.

"I wish to see Miss Kern," he said, to the servant who appeared.

"Miss Kern?" repeated the girl, inquiringly.

"Yes—the young lady who occupies a third-story front room—"

"Oh, you mean the new boarder? Yes, sir. Walk in, please," and ushering him into the parlor, she asked:

"What name shall I say, sir?"

"Um! well—just tell her that Doctor Onnorann would like to see her."

While the servant started on her errand up-stairs, the physician stood in the center of the parlor, stroking his smooth chin, and gazing thoughtfully down at the carpet.

"New boarder, eh? I wonder what that means? Zella Kern generally goes to her aunt's when she comes to town—now she don't, and she's a boarder. A boarder"—repeating the word as if it meant more than he could understand. "Rather queer, this. Wonder if she's alone? If yes, then what's she doing at a strange house?—a boarder—um! a boarder, too."

It did seem that Heaven was unkind in sending Hugh Winfield to Zella's gaze, when the unhappy girl had striven so hard to forget, and to smother the gnawings of her rejected love.

It had cost her every effort of will she was capable of, to do what she had done—say good-bye to all the dear scenes about her home—dear to themselves, though they reminded her bitterly of him to whose heart she had turned in vain.

It was but a sort of apathy, this new life among strangers—a life of trance amid surroundings that were drear.

The shapely head, drooping upon her arm, on the window-sill, was trembling as she sobbed; and she felt, in this fresh pain, as if existence was burdensome—as if she did not, and could never, care for anything.

She had a strong will; but there is no limit to the influences of an absorbing, passionate love—the most rigid hearts will melt, and resolutions of iron are overcome beneath its penetrating power.

All the determination to forget Hugh Winfield, which had been hers, now vanished, and left her with a bleeding heart, a weeping spirit—a being of veriest wretchedness, in atmospheres of woe.

"Oh, Hugh!—Hugh!" she moaned, "I thought you loved me! When you spoke, or in whatever you did, I thought—yes, I was sure I saw some sign of affection. You told me you *did* love me; but is it true? Would you let me suffer in this way, if it was so?" but she added, after a second, as if she would not blame him:

"You don't know, though—you don't know; you'll *never* know, Hugh, what misery you have caused me—no—never."

She raised her tearful eyes to look once again down the street.

But the barouche was gone; only the busy, bustling throng met her straining gaze.

"I cannot live long this way—oh! I *cannot*! Why did I ever let myself love him? Yes—yes—I feel as if—I could—die!"

The head would have bowed again, and a new gush of tears was dimming her vision, when there came a gentle tap at the door.

She started, and hurriedly dried her cheeks. "Come," she said, after a moment, when the heaving bosom was forced to calmness, and her voice schooled to evenness.

"There's a gentleman in the parlor to see you, miss," announced the girl, who entered. "To see me!" in surprise; "who is it? What is his name?"

"He told me just to say that Doctor Onnorann would like to see you."

"Doctor Onnorann!" repeated Zella, in growing astonishment; and she asked herself: "How did he find out I was here? What can he want?"

"Yes, miss, that's the name. Will you come down?—or shall I—shall I tell him to come up here?"

Zella colored slightly. It certainly would not look proper to receive a visitor in her bedroom; yet she resolved to do this, as she did not wish to be seen by the boarders, several of whom were just then returning for dinner. Besides, the caller was a physician, and—

"I will receive him here," she replied, to the girl's question, before she finished debating the point in her mind.

"Yes, miss."

Doctor Onnorann was presently ushered in. He entered with a bow and a smile, rubbing his skinny hands together—a habit he had—and spoke in a pleasant tone.

"Miss Kearns—quite a surprise. How do you do to-day? Hope I see you well. Ah, yes—quite a surprise, indeed. I didn't expect to find you in the city—as a boarder, too."

"Be seated, doctor. Are you well?"

"Always well—always well, thank you, my dear."

At first sound of her voice he detected sadness in it. He saw that she was pale, uneasy of manner, much unlike herself.

"I do not think *you* are in good health, my dear," he said, solicitously, appropriating a chair, and watching her closely.

Zella would not meet his gaze.

"Yes, doctor, I am feeling very badly, I cannot deny it—but not exactly sick; I—indeed, I scarcely know what is the matter with me."

"You are decidedly sick. Permit me."

He slipped snakily from his chair, advanced, felt of her pulse, trying, while he held the white wrist, not to look grave.

"Um! Extraordinary nervousness. How long have you been in town?"

"Not long," answered Zella, after some hesitation.

"That's an evasion," thought Onnorann, watching her half-averted face. "Now, what does she mean by that?" then aloud: "Yesterday?—day before?—to-day?"

"Yesterday," reluctantly.

"Um! Yes. Let me prescribe for you, my dear. Have you anybody here that you can send to the nearest apothecary?"

"Oh, it's of no consequence doctor, I—"

"Tut! Tut! Don't talk nonsense now, You are on the verge of hysterics, I see that plainly."

He stepped over to the bell-rope, despite her protestations; then, while he resumed his seat, and took out his diary to write, he inquired:

"Your father well?"

"Yes—I believe so."

He darted a momentary glance at her over the spectacles, and commented, mentally:

"That's another evasion. What's the matter with her? She's solemn as a ghost, and she used to be frolicsome as a kitten."

But he was completely baffled.

"Something wrong—something wrong. I must sift this."

After one of the servants had been dispatched to the nearest drug-store, he set about trying to ascertain why she was there, exactly when she came, and what had caused the sudden change in her—transforming her from a merry, laughing girl, to a pale, saddened woman.

She evaded his questioning with the readiness of female wit.

After doing his best in vain, in a conversation of nearly two hours, he withdrew.

"Confound it!" he muttered, as he left the house, "I am no wiser for my labor. But I'll see her again to-morrow. I am determined to know what this means. Something wrong—I'll wager on it. Ah! she's a fine girl—very fine. She must be my wife, too,

shortly. Yes, friend Kearns—'marry the first to him who tried to win the widow whose first love died!' This little beauty must marry Theophilus Onnorann, or you'll never find out where *your own* child is—so help me cross-bones! Well, you young rascal—stop your screeching! *Hear me?*" the last to a ragged newsboy, with a dirty face, who came running and screaming loudly, flourishing the evening paper.

"Buy one, sir?—full account of the strange death on the Bellefontaine Road."

"Death on the Bellefontaine, eh?" he stopped short as he questioned, and looked sharply down at the urchin.

"Yes, sir. Big thing. Found dead; and full of blood. Heap of excitement, sir. Buy one?"

"Yes—I'll read it," and as he received and paid for the paper, he was mumbling: "Wonder what it is, now? Bellefontaine, eh? That's pretty close. It might be that Kearns has—"

He was about to fold the journal up and ram it into his pocket, when he felt a sudden prompting to look at the item of importance.

It was on the first page, in display type, and he glanced carelessly at the account.

Immediately, however, he uttered a quick exclamation, his face assumed a rigid expression, and he half crunched the paper in his grasp.

CHAPTER XX.

A TRIO OF SPIES.

"We meet again when years have flown,
When time has wrought a wondrous change,
But do not meet as if unknown
In scenes of silence, awed and strange."
—ANON.

BIG DAN stood for a moment before the entrance to the hallway leading to Doctor Onnorann's office.

Then he passed in—not like one calling on a matter of business, but in a way that would have excited the suspicions of a looker on.

Inside the door he paused, and drew off his boots—then he listened.

"Somethin' 's wrong," he muttered: "I don't see why that old flunk should come out first a-laughin', when Mandor went on particular business, that 'd be mighty ap' to keep Doc Onnorann in the house. Let's see 'bout this 'ere."

He moved stealthily ahead.

As he advanced, he began to grin, and indulged in a scarce-audible chuckle; for he had practiced that thing before, in the hour of midnight, when plying his vocation—a burglar, as the reader may have surmised.

At the head of the stairs he paused a second time and listened.

On one side was the office door, with a card to that effect tacked thereon.

But he had not now any intention of entering there; for a sound had struck his hearing—a familiar sound—a low, weird song.

It came from the story above, and Dan was markedly attentive.

"I've heard that 'ere before!" he exclaimed, half aloud; and he became more and more interested while following the singer's voice, for it reminded him of something that was far in the scenes of the past.

The voice was Beula's. The blind Quadroon, in her prison apartment, was singing, as was her wont, and the air was working a singular effect on Cassar.

Presently he turned to the stairs and started upward.

Reaching the third story, he stole noiselessly forward—tiptoeing, halting anon and glancing around, to be sure that he was not discovered.

Then he came before the door of the room from whence issued the singing that had attracted him.

"I never heard *but* one person have that 'ere tune," he uttered, to himself, "an' it was long ago. *Mighty* strange."

His quick eye soon detected the slide in the panel, and he at once proceeded to open it.

Beula was engaged at knitting—her usual occupation.

Suddenly she started. The song hushed; she turned her sightless orbs in the direction of the door; for a short-breathed exclamation had reached her.

Dan was looking in through the small

opening. He saw a woman whom he knew well, though many years had elapsed since he met her last, and then her eyes were bright and piercing.

"Beula!" fell from his thick lips, in astonishment.

"Who called me?" she demanded, leaning slightly forward, and intent to catch the next sound.

At first he seemed riveted, gazing steadfast in his surprise; then, after a hasty glance behind him, he spoke guardedly:

"Beula?"

"Who calls?" she repeated, while his voice seemed to have struck some eager chord within her.

"One 'at knows you well," answered the giant.

Her memory was keen. A peculiar expression settled on her withered features; she arose and groped her way toward him.

"I know that tongue! I know that tongue!" she croaked.

"You wasn't blind when you an' me was last together—who am I?"

"I know you! I know you!"

She was by the slide, and reached one hand through to feel the face that was peering in.

"Who am I?"

"It's Dan Cassar!" she said, quickly, and in a whisper, "Ho! how came *you* to be here?"

"Yes, it's Dan Cassar."

"I remember you, Dan—why shouldn't I? Oho! I remember you well."

"What 're you *doin'* here?"

"Hush!" raising a warning finger; "don't talk loud—don't talk loud. You've come in good time, Dan Cassar! Who sent you? How did you find old Beula?"

"Jest a kinder accident—"

"Sh! listen: I am a prisoner—"

"I'll jest tum'le you *out*, then," he interrupted, "ef I hev to bu'st the *door* down— you kin bet!"

"Sh! no—no; I don't want to get out. See, Dan—I have no eyes now; I am a helpless old thing. My jailer takes good care of me—he! he! he! and he had best do so," the last with a meaning chuckle. "I might as well die here as anywhere else. But I am afraid to die! I don't want to die yet! Dan Cassar, I am glad you found me. I want to tell you something—something very precious it is."

"What 're you a *pris'ner* for?" he interrogated.

Her mouth twitched, and her fingers worked, as if some inward excitement was preying upon her.

"Onnorann, the doctor, keeps me here."

"What *fer*?"

"Sh! not so loud. I'll tell you—is there anybody near?"

"No."

"Come into the room. Dan Cassar. The key is in the lock outside. Come in—come in."

Dan turned the key, and stepped into the apartment.

She led him to one side, where they could not be seen, in case some one should come to the slide in the panel, and motioned him to sit down.

The giant was filled with a sort of awe in her presence. He watched her as she went across the room to draw up another chair—and he almost imagined he could see the well-remembered eyes as they had been wont to sparkle, when he met her, so many years before.

Beula was about to reveal something. He waited in silence.

James Jiggers, under the influence of the contents of his pocket-flask, was rocking unsteadily at his desk.

The pen had dropped from his hand, his head had sunk forward on his breast, and he finally settled down to a slumber of partial intoxication.

But, despite the extreme care which Cassar exercised in ascending the second flight of stairs, a creaking sound fell on the half-insensible hearing of the sleeper.

Under the circumstances—when his nerves were touchy, and his senses unsettled by the recent occurrence in which he figured—the effect was to rouse Jiggers with a start, and, blinking and ogling, he glanced toward the door of the adjoining room.

Presently, however, the creaking noise was

repeated, and his head turned, like a ball on a pivot, toward the door leading to the entry.

"Somebody out there—(hic) there," he hic-coughed. "Who?—'tain't doctor, for—(hic)—for I know I haven't been asleep long. There it is again."

Whoever it was, he comprehended that they were moving with stealth; more, he knew that the party was proceeding upward, for he was aware of the creaking tendency of the second flight of stairs; and, finally, impelled by his incurable curiosity, he got up and went to the door, which he opened with care.

Looking out through a narrow crack, he was lost in astonishment at beholding a man of enormous build, carrying his boots in his hand, and going upward with catlike tread.

His body stooped his mouth gaped, his ogle eyes stared.

When Dan Cassar disappeared around the landing, Jiggers issued forth and followed after, with the silence of a moving specter. The effect of the liquor left him entirely.

And when Beula drew the giant across to the front of the room, to speak with him, Jiggers was already at the slide, alive to catch every word that might pass.

There was another party, also, to the scene.

At the front of the hall was a long window overlooking the street. Heavy curtains draped before the panes, and behind the curtains was the mulatto girl—Onnorrann's housekeeper—who had seen Cassar go into Beula's room, and who now watched the eavesdropping James Jiggers.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WHISPER OF A SONG.

"I will hope—tho' all forsake me—
In His mercy to the last."

—NORTON.

"Yet had we the power, oh! where is the bosom
Would thrust from its visions the dreams of
the past?"

—ELIZA COOK.

Mrs. Diggs made good her resolution to be careful of the comfort of her new boarder.

Zella's meals were sent up to her—a dinner of substantial fare, with delicate pastries; and in the afternoon the landlady presented herself, with an hour or so of leisure for conversation.

The young girl was deeply susceptible to the many kindnesses Mrs. Diggs inaugurated; she thanked her more than once for those little attentions which she really needed in her present frame of mind, and which were being showered in abundance.

And, all along, good Mrs. Diggs was puzzling her wits to find out something definite of the pale, timid being in whom she felt so great and growing an interest. But Zella revealed nothing.

The afternoon passed away; and when Mrs. Diggs withdrew, Zella had been strengthened by the pleasantries, friendliness, and solicitous chat of her companion.

When evening came on, it found her again seated at the window, looking vacantly out at the stars that peeped forth slowly, one by one—her thoughts flitting in a random field, though still, despite her efforts to the contrary, filled with yearning for the man she loved, and, at times, picturing him in the weirdness of dreamful imagination.

On the mantel-piece was a vial from a near drug store—the result of Doctor Onnorrann's visit; but it remained untouched. It was not that kind of medicine which Zella needed. Her body was not sick; but the heart—the brain—torture was in both, a disease which no physician, with all his arts, could cure.

The stores were being lighted up; a brilliant glare fell on the pavements, the hum of the busy city was dying out, and giving place to that peculiar alternation of hush and noise which marks night time with a sort of solemn strangeness.

Zella's room was dark. The moments were fleeting; yet the dreamer, with a soul absorbed in melancholy, sat motionless and silent—oblivious to everything save the pain that reigned within her bosom.

She was more than ever beautiful at that moment, with the fitful flashes from the

street below playing upon her pallid features—her jetty hair curling round her neck, and clustering in ringlets on her white brow, and the two dark eyes glistening, part with wet, part with that heavenly luster which, it would seem, all her weeping and sadness could not dim.

Suddenly she started. "There floated to her hearing a soft strain of music—a guitar and a voice in song.

The hand that touched the strings was a master one, and the air it accompanied was one of unusual sweetness.

Some poor waif, perhaps, without a home, or friends, or food, was roaming through the street, hoping to obtain a morsel as the reward of her efforts on the instrument.

It could be but a child—the voice was low and timid, yet seeming to glow with pathos.

Zella listened. The words of the song had struck her. It was as if the wanderer strove to allay the misery of her own hopeless spirit, while appealing to the heedless throng.

And these were the words of the strain that rose to the ear of the sorrowful listener.

"Think not life is smooth forever,
Tears are as apt as bliss—
All the sweets of earth were never
Wrought pure in their purest kiss.
Glad smiles are the sunbeams of love,
Frowns are the gall of joy,
And both, ever present, will prove
Life is not without alloy.

"Oh! banish the cloud of sorrow,
Woo the bright gold of smiles—
Think of the peace of to-morrow,
And not of to-day with its trials.
Happiness dwells all around thee,
Come and gather thy share;
Forget that sorrow hath bound thee,
And live in dreams that are fair."

When it ceased, Zella's eyes were full of tears, and her heart went out in a double pity for the child.

"Ah! girl," she murmured, "you little know that one like me has listened to you—listened to words that are but a mockery. Perhaps, yes, you *are* living a life that is all gloom, without one ray of love's sunbeam to bring a smile to your young lips; but you are not the only one—not the only miserable or unhappy—no, not the only one!"

The street-child had passed on; and a bowed figure sat at the upper window, with face buried in her hands, sobbing, sobbing, sobbing, under the influence of that song, whose words and notes told of a life [of woe.

It was nearly nine o'clock, when one of the house-servants tapped at Zella's door.

"A lady to see you, miss," was the announcement, as the girl looked searchingly about the shadowy apartment.

"To see me!—a lady?" in surprise.

"Yes, miss."

"I guess there must be some mistake—"

"No, miss—she doesn't know your name; she only said she wanted to see the young lady who was sitting at the third-story window about noon to-day, and saw a barouche go past. She said you'd remember if I told you that. It must be you, for there's only one other lady boarder, and she's on the second floor."

Zella's heart gave a great throb. Who could it be?

Mention of the barouche startled her.

While she was silent in amazement and wonder, the girl asked:

"Will you come down, miss?"

"No—I will receive her here," involuntarily, almost, yet prompted by a feeling that she would prefer to see this visitor in privacy.

And when the servant had departed, she asked herself, while she hastened to light the large globe lamp on the table:

"Who can it be? I—I scarce know why, but—I feel very strange, just now. I am very nervous. I dread something. Is anything to happen? I must fight it off. I must be calm. Who can it be?"

Her question was soon answered.

In a few moments the door opened, and Ilde Wyn entered. Before the comer had taken half a dozen steps she paused. Both she and Zella only partially stifled an exclamation of surprise, for each saw that the other was a counterpart of herself.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES?

What when the rude grasp of sorrow has bound us

To fates that are darkest and scenes that are cold,

If the clouds hover unending around us,
Like skies that in April have marred the day's gold?

Feelings the saddest so often attended
With glooms that are deepest, like waves of the sea,

Come never singly, but shadowful, blended
Each one with the other, and will ever be.

AND this is what caused Doctor Theophilus Onnorrann to exclaim aloud, the spectacles to slip forward on his nose, his small gray eyes to stare, his brows to knit, and his skinny fingers to twine with a crunch in the margin of his newspaper, like so many tiny serpents weaving, twisting and wriggling themselves around a hated tissue:

"SUDDEN DEATH ON THE BELLEFONTAINE.—Just as we are going to press our reporter brings us word of the sudden and mysterious death of Mr. Kilbur Kearns, who lived some distance beyond the Bellefontaine Cemetery, and in rather a retired spot. He was discovered this morning by a neighbor—who accidentally called—lying on the floor of his bedroom, with pools of blood upon the carpet, his face frightfully distorted, and bearing every evidence of having struggled hard before succumbing. Whether there is foul play connected with the affair, remains to be shown. At present we can only surmise. The coroner was summoned promptly. We hope to be able to treat the suspicious subject more at length in our next edition."

"The devil has turned a somerset," exclaimed Onnorrann, as he rammed the paper into his pocket, adjusted his spectacles, and darted down the street toward a cab that stood at the first corner.

Engaging the cab, and giving the driver his orders, he seated himself inside, and was presently being borne, at a rattling rate, toward the country cottage.

And while he swayed from side to side, and bumped up and down with the jolting of the vehicle, he was thinking and muttering thus:

"Hal—trouble. A bad go. I knew it—I told him he'd die in a wink; it's heart disease. I told him he hadn't any time for fooling; so, split my knee-cap! he's 'gone up.' Now, he's dead. Hal a bad fix—a mess. More mystery; Zella away from home; her father dies suddenly; must have happened last night, too. What's the meaning of that? My present plans are flatly demolished. The thing is in my own hand. I must work alone. No Kearns, now, to force to aid me—no. Must secure the pretty orphan, unaided. Kearns' will?—I'll look after that. Eh?—not so bad. Wait. We'll see. Ha, now! I'll strike a 'vein' out there—You rascal on the box! where's your whip?—faster! A snail's pace, this. Go on!"

Crack! went the whip, and the horses, smarting and chafing, near broke into a run. The cab flew on with its excited occupant.

For Onnorrann had lost much of his wonted calmness.

He removed his spectacles several times, each time giving them a rub; he took off his hat, put it on again; smoothed his chin, then his nose—looked out the window and down at the carpeting, and all the while muttered and mumbled inaudibly, twitching his fingers, screwing up his mouth, biting his nails, finally settling himself back, with a nervous sigh, to reperuse the paragraph of importance in the newspaper.

But when he reached the scene of death, he was cool as a breath of spring, and entered the house with an air of extraordinary professional gravity—toying, however, with a gold toothpick, and darting keen, covert glances in every direction.

There had been quite a number of people present; but these the undertaker had dispersed—he having come at the call of a neighbor, and, in the absence of any member of the family, assuming temporary authority. He and two others, including a reporter from one of the St. Louis dailies, were the only ones then on the spot.

The neighbor who had given the alarm was

one of the two men who kept the undertaker company. He knew that Onnorrann was Kearn's physician—or judged so, by having seen him there frequently, and knowing his profession.

Onnorrann and the undertaker were at once introduced—the latter a man very like the physician, save that he was much smaller, much thinner, with a squeaky voice and large, pale eyes.

"What about the coroner?" asked Onnorrann, as the two retired to an inner room.

"Been here. Verdict: heart disease, and hemorrhage, simultaneously."

"Sensible," making his toothpick snap at a motion of the thumb.

"Sensible?"

"I knew it."

"You knew it?"

A pause.

"Bury him to-morrow, I believe, said the man of collins, presently, with a snifle and a jerky sigh.

"Sensible again."

"Sensible again?"

"Serve him right."

"Serve him right?"

"Better under ground than on top, you know."

Onnorrann winked. The undertaker nodded.

"Where is his daughter?" inquired the physician—a sort of feeler.

"Daughter?" staring.

"Been here yet?"

"Guess not."

"Strange."

"Very. I didn't know he had any daughter."

"He has."

"Yes—of course."

Another pause. Then the furnisher of ice boxes:

"Uml! Is she aware—"

"Not a bit."

"Where is she?"

"In the city."

"Uml!"

"Are you going back to the city before night?"

"I have to. It's late now."

"So much the better."

"So much the better?"

"You can advise Miss Kearn of what has happened."

"Oh—yes, certainly, of course."

"Here is her address. When you apprise her of the sad occurrence, it would be as well to hasten her out here at once."

"I'll see to it myself," said the diminutive personage, pocketing the card Onnorrann gave him, which bore the name of the street and number of the house where Zella was stopping.

Then the doctor said:

"You may present your bill to me, for the expenses of this affair."

"Yes—certainly—thank you."

"As I am the family physician, and am well posted in regard to Mr. Kearn's private affairs, I will assume the management and responsibility, at least for the present."

"Of course—very proper."

"You may go to town as soon as you please—as I said, the sooner the better. I would like Miss Kearn to come immediately."

"Yes."

"I will take charge."

"Very good. Ahem! good-day, then. I'll be off."

"Good-day."

The undertaker glided away, and, summoning his assistants, who were outside, drove off in his wagon. The reporter accompanied him, having secured all possible "light" on the circumstances of the occasion.

Onnorrann soon got rid of the friendly neighbor, who seemed inclined to linger; and when alone with the dead the physician proceeded to close all the windows and doors.

His narrow, skinny face wore a peculiar look; the small eyes in the green spectacles were sparkling with an unusual brightness.

Having made all secure against intrusion, he paused to take a brief survey of the corpse in the ice-box, and then, with a strange smile turning the corners of his mouth, he moved toward the stairway leading to the second story.

"Now for it!" he whispered, ascending on tiptoe—as if he feared that even the dead man might catch the sound of his suspicious movements.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BEULA'S SECRET.

"Treasured secrets of the heart
To thy care I hence intrust."

—HANNAH F. GOULD.

WE return to Dan Cassar, who sat silent and awed in the room which was the prison of the blind quadroom.

She brought a chair close, and, seating herself, leaned forward to grasp his coat-sleeve with her fleshless fingers.

The giant recoiled slightly as he felt the long nails almost penetrating to his arm.

"Jest hold on, now," he said; "take your han' off, ef you please."

She grinned.

"You are not afraid of me?—not afraid of old Beula?"

"I ain't afeerd o' nothin' 'at crawls, walks, stands, or gouges, I ain't; but—jest take your han' off."

"I want to tell you something," whispered she, removing the grip that was disagreeable to him.

"Well, let's have it."

"You remember *that* night, Dan Cassar—long ago?"

"Kinder. You mean when you brought me that 'ere young 'un?"

"Yes."

"It was a night 'at people don't forget in a hurry, it was."

"The lightning danced in the skies, like snakes of fire; and the thunders roared and belched like cannon; and the rivers of the clouds poured down—eh? It was a sight."

"I remember," broke in the giant, reflectively.

"I had eyes then, Dan Cassar—they were bright and flashing—the envy of many a white belle who knew me. Those eyes guided me through the darkness of that stormy night, till I came to your frame shanty—"

"You kem to my frame shanty."

"Beneath my cloak I carried a baby girl. It was then six months old."

"I remember that 'ere well enough."

"But, I want to tell you who that child was," she said, quickly, and again catching him by the sleeve.

"No?" he exclaimed. "Why, you said 'at you didn't know *who* it was, when I asked about it."

"I know I did, Dan Cassar—I know I did. But, I lied. I was doing that thing for money. I stole the child from its parents, to satisfy the hate of a man who paid me well for my part."

Cassar was gazing intently into the blind face, and he listened raptly.

"Are you sure we're alone, Dan? Look around—I can't see."

"Yes. Go on. 'Bout this 'ere gal?"

"Listen, then. There was once a beautiful woman living in St. Louis—I'll be brief at it—who was loved by Onnorrann, the doctor. She was the only woman he ever loved; but he could not win her for his wife. She married a man named Calvert Mandor—"

"Calvert Mandor?"

"The wedded couple had a child, whom they called Zella. Onnorrann was always Mandor's enemy; and when he saw his rival's success, he determined to put him out of the way."

"Put 'im out o' the way!"

"He resolved to have his life."

"Yes."

"There was, at a certain livery-stable, a horse nearly as wild as any untamed steed of the prairie—no one could manage him. One afternoon, Onnorrann, who, to further his plans, always acted the part of a friend, proposed a ride on horseback."

"On horseback?"

"Mandor was a great horseman. His skill was famous. Through some mutual acquaintances Mandor was approached with a bet that he dare not mount this very horse. He was of a bold nature, and it did not take much to persuade him."

"Yes?"

"He rode the horse—rode to his death; for

he has never been heard of since. That was just nineteen years ago."

"Ay," thought the giant; "I know what became of Cal Mandor. I nursed 'im through four years, while he was a *crazy* man, I did; an' it's on'y been fifteen years sence he was 'imself, an' began to hunt after his little 'un."

Then aloud:

"Jest go on, Beula."

"After Mandor was removed, Onnorrann, the doctor, tried for the widow's hand. But, again he failed. She never liked him. And, to be rid of him, she married Wilbur Kearn, before she took off her mourning weeds."

"Marr'd Wilbur Kearn."

"The marriage took place in a far city, and was not known here till some time afterward. One year after this second marriage there was another child. Onnorrann, hating the pair, with all his devil nature, was watching them. When this child was six months old he hired me to steal it away—and I brought it to you."

"Bro't it to me," repeated Dan, who was thinking deeply.

"At the birth of this child—which was called Olse—Wilbur Kearn's wife died. On her death-bed she left considerable money to her husband; and, she was so attached to him, that she expressed a wish for Zella, her first child, to be known under her step-father's name. This was done—"

"It was done."

"Zella Mandor became Zella Kearn."

"Zella Mandor is Zella Kearn!" he exclaimed.

"She is—but she don't know about the change."

"And she's Cal Mandor's daughter?"

"Yes."

"O-h-o!" and Dan felt that he had gained some valuable information.

"When I had stolen Olse Kearn," pursued the quadroom, "I wanted Onnorrann to pay me more money, and I threatened to tell what I had done."

"Told 'im you'd blab."

"He cast me into this room, and I've been a prisoner ever since."

"How long?"

"Nearly seventeen years. But, wait! Kearn knew that Onnorrann was his enemy, and went to him, the first thing, to accuse him with being a party to the theft of the child. He came with stern and angry words. But Onnorrann laughed at him; and he brought him up to this room, showed me to him as the holder of the secret—and I had to repeat a lesson which was taught me, not to be forgotten, under a terrible penalty."

"Why didn't Kearn bring down the police?"

"Because Onnorrann swore that before Kearn could do it, he'd kill me, and my secret would die with me—he didn't know what I had done with the child; but, knew that I could find it, if need be. Hear, though: whenever Kearn came before me, I was to repeat these words:

"One twice wedded, wife of two,
Child by each, and a child that's lost;
One who never father knew,
And one that's on life's billows tos't.
Marry the first to him that tried
To win the widow whose first love died;
Then will the lost one be restored,
And balm on sorrow's wounds he poured."

They are words of fate! He! he! he!"

"Words o' fate!"

"He! he! he! and they mean this: Calvert Mandor's wife married twice. By each husband she had a child. The first was Zella, the second was Olse. Olse is the one that never knew a father. Onnorrann tried to win the widow, when Mandor disappeared. Failing in this, he resolved that Zella should become his wife when she reached a proper age; and so, for nearly seventeen years, Wilbur Kearn has been coming to that very slide in the door, to beg me to tell him where his Olse could be found. When he first began to come I had eyes—but they withered away, somehow, and I've been blind a long, long while. Do you know, Dan Cassar—and the clasp on his sleeve tightened—"I sometimes think that Onnorrann, the doctor, destroyed my sight by mixing poisonous drugs in my foot! He did it so that I would not want to escape from here."

"But, say! why in *thunder* didn't you up an' tell Kearn when 'e kem to the—"

"Aha! aha! that's it. See Onnorrann threatened to poison me if I let the secret out before he should marry Zella Kearn! And he always came with Kearn—always. I'm afraid to die!—yes—I'm afraid. I fear the poison, Dan Cassar—"

She was interrupted in rather an unexpected way.

Dan leaped from his chair, toward the door. He had caught sight of a small white object protruding over the edge of the slide in the panel.

It was a human ear. Jiggers, in his eagerness to catch all that passed, had thus betrayed himself. Before he could retreat, he was wriggling in the iron grasp of the giant, who threw the terrified fellow to his knees, and glowered above him.

At the same moment the quadroom, who was secreted behind the curtains, darted from her hiding-place to flee down the stairs.

But, big Dan, without losing his hold on Jiggers, and jerking the latter forward with a suddenness that nearly broke his bones, made one spring at the fleeing girl, and clutched her fiercely by the throat.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FACE TO FACE.

"A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate!"

—BAILLIE.

My very soul seems moldering in my bosom!"

—BYRON.

THE two young girls eyed each other in silence, after their simultaneous exclamation.

Astonishment was pictured on the features of both.

Ilde Wyn was first to recover.

"Strangel!" muttered the beautiful young ex-queen of the thieves, while she regarded Zella steadfastly with her large, lustrous orbs—and met there, in return, a gaze so much like her own, that it seemed but a perfect reflection of it.

Then she added, interrogatively:

"Who are you?"

"Who are *you*?" demanded Zella, beginning to resist the sensations of awe, the feeling of amazement which seized her upon the appearance of her counterpart.

"You shall know, presently," returned Ilde, in a meaning way.

"Tell me now," insisted Zella. "There is something very singular in this—"

"Granted," was the interruption. "But, for the present, we will not discuss it. I have come to say that you—"

"That I?"

"That you have awakened a great curiosity in me."

"A curiosity?"

"I have come quite a distance to see you—to have a few words with you. You remember me passing here to-day in a barouche?"

"Ah! the barouche!" thought Zella, as, for a second's time, the occurrence at midday was recalled to her mind.

But we will deviate slightly, just at this point, to say:

Hugh Winfield called at the house of Ilde Wyn at precisely the hour agreed upon, when he parted with his new betrothed, on the evening of his first visit to her.

Ilde summoned her barouche to the front door—an elegant turn-out, with mettlesome steeds, coal-black and glossy; harness richly mounted, and quivering, in places, with pivoted stars; a driver attired in flash livery, a vehicle for pleasure, costily furnished and luxuriously easy.

The young man had mastered himself marvelously since the night previous. And, as the couple were borne along, viewing the places of interest panoramized before them by the well-instructed driver, Hugh was even merry, under the influence of Ilde's bright smiles and melodious voice.

"See, Hugh—there is your father. He is bowing."

They passed Cyrus Winfield, who raised his hat. He was the same man on the street he had ever been—proud, haughty; a man who walks with a tread of confidence, and lives in conscious power.

He looked after them and uttered:

"God bless that boy! He has proved himself a noble, noble son!"

As he was about to move on, an individual of short stature, wearing a slouch hat and a heavy beard, stepped up and tapped him familiarly on the arm.

"Well, sir?—ah!"

"Yes, it's me. I want to tell you that I'm on the scent."

"Ha!—on the scent, eh?"

"Exactly. Eversee this?" He displayed a twenty-dollar gold-piece, which had three round holes punched in it, on the imaginary line of a triangle; and, across the face of it, there was a rude cross, evidently cut in an idle moment, by a former owner.

"Ha!—the devil! You have it! The very double-eagle I described to you!"

"Exactly. See? I'm on the scent. Found this at a provision-store not an hour ago; have traced it up; think I've spotted the party—only suspicion, though."

Exchanging a few more words and knowing looks, the two separated.

The man with the bushy whiskers stood contemplating the coin which he held, and mused thus:

"I must be on the right trail. Got this from a provision-dealer this morning—he said he'd had it since yesterday morning. He got it from one of the servants living at No. — Place, which is the house occupied by that pretty girl who just drove by. Now, this piece can't have passed through many hands—the theft was committed night before last. It's a tough thing to suspicion a person who owns livery, and 'swings' high; and it's twice as hard to prove it. We'll wait, though, and we'll see."

It was a detective, already on the track of those who had robbed Cyrus Winfield!

But we must follow Ilde Wyn and her lover.

Suddenly, as they were passing through a certain street, on their way homeward, Ilde noticed a quick pallor over spread her companion's face.

She saw him glance upward; and more, following the direction of that glance, she saw the picture of woe and pleading at the third-story window of the boarding house—the clasped hands, the tearful eyes, the parted, moaning lips.

It was all in a second of time; and then they were leaving the vicinity behind.

Hugh became markedly silent. His actions were full of uneasiness; his brow knit in the great effort of will he called up, to meet and conquer the pain this unexpected sight had caused him.

The beauty watched him closely—but in a way, from beneath the long, drooping lashes of jet, that he did not detect the study of her gaze.

In a few moments she said, as if nothing had transpired:

"I am sorry we came through this street."

"Sorry? Why?" with a start and a keen look.

"Oh, it is too full of business—we rode out for pleasure," she answered, carelessly; and then, to the man on the box:

"Out of this street as soon as possible, Jerome; I don't like it."

In obedience to her order, the barouche whirled around the nearest corner.

And she was exclaiming like this, within herself, still regarding Hugh covertly:

"Who can that girl be? What is Hugh Winfield to her? What meant that cry from the window?—I heard her call his name, I will declare! Ha! an old flame! Perhaps a sweetheart that he is trying in vain to cast off? See him: it affects him deeply. He does not know that I saw—that I am watching him now. The occurrence has made me nervous. I fear I must examine into it. I shall remember the house. If what I suspicion is true"—and the soft hands clinched till the nails pierced the flesh—"I must bribe or force her to leave the city. Or, she shall be abducted forever from his sight. I will seek out Perry and Neol, despite our compact. They will serve me. She must be removed."

Hugh Winfield did not perceive the cautious glances of his beautiful companion; the clinching of the small fists, the compression of the red lips, and the outlines of some strong, inward determination which dwelt in her face—all these escaped him;

for he was absorbed by the effects of this unexpected vision of the girl he still loved, notwithstanding his efforts to uproot the passion, and the allegiance due to Ilde; and memory of the wrong he had done her, was again working acutely on his tortured spirit.

It was in the early evening, when Hugh had gone, when she had assumed a plainer attire—that Ilde Wyn glided from her residence, and along the street, in the direction of Zella's boarding-house.

She entered a car which bore her very nearly the whole distance toward her destination.

And now we find her in the presence of one who was, in *her* mind, a dangerous rival.

"Yes, the barouche," repeated Ilde, as though she read the other's thoughts. "You remember, do you not?"

"I remember it," replied Zella, calmly.

"Ah! you do? I am glad of it. Then you must, even now, surmise the object of my visit?"

"You are mistaken—I do not. But if you have much to say, please be seated."

"I *have* much to say"—and Ilde seated herself, while Zella did the same—"but I shall say it in a few words. I want you, first, to know that I saw the scene—"

"You saw the scene?"

"At the window."

"The window?"

"I saw you there, when we passed; I heard you cry out something—the words I did not hear; I saw you clasp your hands, and gaze after the gentleman in my company, as if he were dear to you—"

"As if he were dear to me!"

"That is it. Do you begin to comprehend?"

Zella was coloring with an involuntary blush—her face was twice beautiful in the kindling of emotion within her. Her eyes were like two bright stars in a ground of crimson.

"Well, if you saw all this?" she asked, forcing her voice to evenness.

"If I saw it! You are dull. He is my affianced husband."

"No!" cried Zella, while a great pain gripped her fluttering heart.

Ilde elevated her brows.

"But it is true."

"No! no!" Her lovely face was turning between pallor and blush; the brilliant orbs flashed incredulously upon the calm speaker.

"Hugh Winfield is to be my husband within a fortnight."

"Within a fortnight!" echoed Zella, breathlessly, as if she doubted her ears.

"Yes. So I am here to warn you—"

"To warn me!"

"That, for your own peace of mind, you had better leave this city as early as possible. It can do you no good to remain. He never can be yours—for he is mine. I plainly see that there has existed some old-time link of affection between you—you love him still—"

"Love him!"—Zella fairly screamed the words, as she stared wildly at her rival—"I worship him! You marry Hugh Winfield? You jest! This is a cruel dream!—impossible! He is *mine*! You do not love him as I do! I—" But she stopped short; then her head bowed, with a hysterical sob; she buried her face in her hands, and moaned:

"Oh, Heaven pity me!"

This was too much. Her poor heart—already torn and bleeding in an agony worse than death—felt, now, as if a dagger had pierced it through and through.

Ilde contemplated the drooping form, half-regretfully, half in triumph.

During the long pause which ensued, there was a knock at the door.

"Sure this is her room?" a voice was heard to inquire, on the outside.

"Yes, sir, I'm sure," answered a second party.

The door opened, and the undertaker, whom we have seen at the cottage home, entered their presence.

He came in a high state of excitement—yet striving to appear calm; while he advanced, with his hat in his hand, bowing, bending, smiling forcedly, looking from one to the other of the two young ladies.

CHAPTER XXV.

NOT THERE.

"Now you see it—now you don't."

BIG DAN scowled, and drew back his thick lips, till his broad mouth displayed a set of white, strong teeth.

Jiggers uttered an ear-splitting squeal as his bones began to ache from the thump caused by his captor's agile spring.

And the quadroon vented a half-choked scream, as she felt the hand at her throat.

"Shet up!" growled the giant, while he tightened his vise-like grip on each. "Shet that noise, or I'll knock you both together, till there ain't no more life into you than a mashed skelter! *Mind, now.*"

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" howled Jiggers, in combined pain and fright; "you're breaking my shoulder right in half, indeed you are! Let go! I won't run off, I vow! I'm a friend, indeed I am! I can tell you something very important. Won't you—ouch!—won't—oo-oh!—won't you please let go! My shoulder! my shoulder!—it's mashed all up!"

Dan saw that he spoke earnestly. After hesitating a moment, he released him—sending him sprawling by a powerful twist of his arm; and Jiggers scrambled to his feet in a bewildered way.

At the same time the giant let go his hold on the throat of the mulatto girl, but he still retained a grip of iron on her arm.

"Keep her!" cried Jimmy.

"What was you a-doin' at that 'ere door?" interrupted Dan.

"I was listening. I heard everything—"

"Hal"—taking a step toward him.

"Wait now, you! I want to tell you something, indeed. It's something very important. It's all about Calvert Mandor."

"Ah! Cal Mandor."

"Yes; it's about him. I'm a friend of his—or I'm going to be. But, put that yellow girl into this room. Let's lock her up. She can tell on us, although she's a mute—Doctor Onnorann cut her tongue out. Put her in the room."

Acting on Jiggers's suggestion, Dan dragged the girl into the prison apartment.

He saw that the other had something to speak about, and whatever it might be he was curious and impatient to hear it.

Pushing her across the room, while Jiggers remained at the door, he turned to the quadroon, who still sat in the chair against the wall.

"Beula, I'm a-goin'."

Then he noticed that the withered form was motionless and limp, that her head hung forward till the pointed chin rested on her bosom.

Filled with a sudden suspicion, he went up to her, and peered into the narrow, shriveled face, and the next moment he exclaimed:

"Dead, by thunder!"

"Dead!" came an echo from the doorway.

The life of the aged quadroon had gone out on the instant Dan Cassar leaped from his chair, to see who it was cavedropping at the slide in the door-panel.

"Don't stop," said Jimmy, uneasily; "we haven't any time to spare. Doctor Onnorann may drop on us at any minute. Come—"

Dan expressed himself to the mulattress.

"If you make any kind o' fuss, now, an' 'arm anybody, so's to get out, I'll be back onto you, nig, an' it'll be the worse for you ef I come. Mind? Jest keep your mouth shet, ef you know when you're well off;" and, with a meaning nod, he strode away.

The prisoner only replied with a frowning, angry, half defiant look, and this followed the giant, till he disappeared beyond the door, which he secured after him.

"Now bob head, what've you got to say?"

"Sh, come down-stairs."

Reaching the office, Jiggers turned the key in the lock.

"If I tell you a secret, will you protect me against the doctor?"

"Protect you?"

"He'd chew me up if he found out what I'm going to do."

"Jest go on, bob-head, and if you get into a fix on my 'count, I'll stan' by you."

Jiggers felt strengthened by this assur-

ance, for he saw in Big Dan a formidable protector.

"I'm Jim Jiggers, the drunkard!—Jiggers, the sot!" he said, a little hoarsely, and laying one hand on the arm of his ally, while his ogle eyes started: "I'm known by that title by people who spit on me, and call me a dog and a fool, and who kick me when they have nothing handier. I do love liquor—I can't help it. But I'm no dog, nor am I the idiot they have named me. 'Sh! hark! isn't that some one coming? No—I only thought it. I've been so long under the thumb of Onnorann, the doctor, that I'm a miserable, scarey baby. Listen: I heard everything that blind woman said"—glancing about him, and speaking lowly: "Do you know where Calvert Mandor is?"

"No—where is he?" quickly, for the question reminded him of his being there.

"He's down a hole."

"A hole?"

"'Sh! yes; in the back room, there"—pointing solemnly toward the door of the adjoining apartment. "But he's dead, I vow; for the fall is steep, and his head must be broken."

"Let's see 'bout that 'ere—"

"No—hold on," interrupted Jiggers, detaining the other; "it's no use; he's dead," certain. Besides, we haven't time. The doctor will be here soon, and he might catch us—"

Dan did not pause, however, but advanced and turned the knob.

On the instant there was a dull, whirring noise; he uttered a sharp cry, and staggered backward, almost falling.

He had received a shock from a powerful battery, which was contrived by Onnorann, to prevent James Jiggers spying into the contents of the room.

"My!" exclaimed Jimmy with a sympathetic jump.

"Curse it! I'm purty nigh killed!"

"Better keep away; the devil's in there, I guess—he communes with Old Nick, I know. Hark! I heard a noise. We must hurry!"

Dan recovered presently, and he paid attention to Jiggers, who said:

"Now, just before this Calvert Mandor died, nineteen years ago—as it was supposed—he made a will."

"A will?"

"Doctor Onnorann got hold of that will, and he forged a copy of it. In the forged instrument he inserted a clause providing, that, if before a certain date, Mandor's heirs—do you understand?"

"Jest go on, bob-head; think I'm a fool?"

"That if none of Mandor's heirs came forward, before a certain date, then he, Doctor Onnorann, was to receive the full benefit of the will."

"O-ho! more news," thought the listener; and aloud: "Well, and what then?"

"I know where the forged will is."

"You do?"

"Yes—"

"Where at?"

"'Sh!" Jiggers advanced on tip-toe to the book-shelf, his bow-legs at a double bend, and his ogle eyes rolling.

"Here!" he said, pointing to the books, Cassar went up to the place indicated, and, at one pull, displaced several books, which crashed to the floor.

But the space beyond was bare!

"I don't see nothin', bob-head," grumbled the giant, as he looked into the cavity. "Guess you've kinder made a mistake?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DOUBLE TORTURE.

"We are forsaken in our utmost need—
By Heaven and earth forsaken!"

—MRS. HERMAN.

"* * * * A haunting shade is brought
Of love and happiness forever gone."

—NORTON.

THE servant girl, who admitted the undertaker, gazed surprisedly from one to the other of the two occupants of the room.

So marked was the likeness between Ilde and Zella, that she was at a loss to decide which was the new boarder.

The undertaker also noticed the resemblance, and he hesitated as to how he should address them.

"Um! Ah! I— Wonderful! Sisters, no

doubt! I—" Then aloud: "Really—pardon me; I wish to see Miss Kearn."

"My name, sir," Zella informed him.

"Ah! now we have it. Truly! Pardon me, Miss Kearn—I am sorry, I am regretful, I—a—my card." He handed her his card, which bore his name—Thomas Thorntop—and an indication of his business.

"Well, Mr. Thorntop?" she said, inquiringly.

"My dear Miss—pardon me; really, I—a—I am the bearer of bad news—ahem!—very bad news. That is—"

"That is?" Zella repeated, wondering.

Ilde Wyn was staring at her rival in a singular way, from the moment her name was mentioned. At its first utterance by the undertaker she had started slightly; now she was occupied, part with listening to hear what the comer had to say, and part with scanning Zella's features in a peculiar earnestness.

"I hope, I trust, I desire, I—really, my dear Miss Kearn, I'm very awkward, you see; and—"

"And?" as he paused short.

"I've just come from your home."

"From my home?—you?"

"Yes. It's very unpleasant, you know, but it must be done; and I—a—that is—" He seemed to stumble every time, as if it were impossible to frame the announcement.

This hesitating, uneasy, embarrassed behavior was quick to excite Zella's apprehensive suspicious—the more so after she had taken another glance at the card, and saw printed there the business calling of the man before her.

"Mr. Thorntop, what have you to say?"

"I—pardon me; have you seen this evening's paper?"

"No."

"You have not—so. I'm on a very embarrassing mission, my dear Miss Kearn—"

"What has happened?" she demanded, quickly, though trying to be calm; for, now, a strange dread began to creep into her heart, an inexplicable sensation of fear seized her.

"I hope you will be calm—"

"I am calm—speak."

"Be reasonable—"

"I am reasonable. Speak, I say."

"Your—your father died last night—some time near midnight, it is supposed." And he exclaimed, inwardly: "There, by the rocks! it's out at last."

"Dead?—dead? My father dead?" sitting, white as a sheet, and looking vacantly.

"Yes, my dear Miss Kearn," he said, mildly, and bowing so that he might not see the expression of terrible agony in her young face.

"Dead!"

One second, there reigned an unearthly stillness, an atmosphere of utter silence, yet full of whisperings. Then there was a single groan of woe, that sounded like the wail of a crushed soul, and Zella sunk backward.

Ilde was womanly. She felt deeply for the stricken girl. Instantly she and the undertaker were bathing the marble-like brow.

"Poor thing—poor thing!" whispered Thorntop.

"See: she is reviving," said Ilde.

Zella slowly opened her eyes, and gazed bewilderedly upon them.

But soon the realization of everything came back to her.

Starting up, she cried, lowly, more to herself:

"Oh, Heaven! what—what have I done to merit all these sorrows? Would that I could die! Would that I could die!"

"Hush! Don't talk that way," reproved Ilde; while she pressed her rival's hand even affectionately.

"My dear Miss Kearn—"

But Zella interrupted Thomas Thorntop with a suddenness that made him start.

"Will you please order a carriage for me? I must go at once. Make haste. I must go to papa. Dead!—can it be possible? Oh hurry—hurry, please."

The tears had left her eyes. A remarkable calmness came over her. Just the slightest excitement was perceptible.

And Thorntop began to feel exceedingly restless, for he look was wild, meaningless, her voice almost harsh in its brief tone.

"I have a carriage at the door."

"Let us go at once. Hasten!" she interrupted again, hurriedly gathering up her hat and shawl.

As she was about to leave the room, followed by the undertaker, she paused and turned toward Ilde Wyn.

A new and powerful emotion worked upon her; the nearly colorless lips were compressed so tight that these words came forcedly from between them:

"Whoever you are, perhaps you have told me the truth—that Hugh Winfield is to be your husband within a fortnight. Be it so. I love him—I have worshiped him in vain, till, now, I do not care to live! Why should I live?—I have nothing in the world to live for. I am a poor, hopeless, desperate girl—robbed of everything I loved—alone and friendless. Take Hugh Winfield—take him; I yield him to you. But, oh! remember—remember when you are happiest in his love, that there may be a wretched, lifeless heart still yearning for him, a spirit that is withered forever. Take him—but, I beseech you, try and never let him come where I can see him! Take him—and I wish you joy!"

"Stay!—stop!—listen to me!" cried Ilde, stepping forward.

But Zella was gone.

She fled swiftly down the stairs—Thomas Thornton tripping and stumbling after her, till it would seem he must fall and dislocate a limb.

A few seconds after, there was a rumbling sound of wheels; and Zella, sitting alone, inside the vehicle, was being borne toward that home which was now creative of a threefold misery within her fated life.

When Ilde left the boarding-house, immediately after—while half its occupants were exciting themselves over a discussion of the scene—a marvelous change was noticeable in her.

Some deep, deep thought absorbed her; and, as she hurried along, she was murmuring, in an enigmatical way:

"How strange!—how strange this is! What can it mean! Her name is Kearn!—a name that has been before me ever since I learned to read. I must see her again. There is some mystery here—I must penetrate it. I must know more of her. Kearn?—Kearn? How very, very strange!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

"Hate stronger, under show of love well feigned,

The way which to her ruin now I tend."

—MILTON.

"It never through my mind had passed

The time would e'er be o'er—

And I on thee should look my last,

And thou shouldst smile no more!"

—WOLFE.

It was night in both city and country.

The notes of the whip-poor-will were ringing in the forest depths.

Nature had slowly gathered in its many voices of the golden day; the anthems of new choristers arose to murmur through the quiet hours; and the bright flowers, whose gentle perfume charmed the air of solitude, sunk to sleep beneath the cool, gemful skies.

At the secluded cottage, where hung the awful gloom of death, there reigned a tombly silence.

For some time a single light had been flitting from room to room in the second story.

This light was carried by Theophilus Onnorann, and the physician's narrow, sallow, thin-skinned face wore a highly jubilant expression.

Just at this particular moment he was in search of something, for he waved the lamp on every side, and about his head, while the spectacled eyes, keen and sparkling, darted glances of close scrutiny in every direction.

Presently he exclaimed: "Ah!" and then: "Um!" and, wheeling abruptly, he advanced to a certain portion of one of the four walls.

Directly before him, at a height of five feet, and distinctly outlined, was a painted heart, about five inches in its greatest diameter.

He had found what he wanted.

But, before we explain the importance of this discovery to him, we must see what Theophilus Onnorann did when he ascended the stairs, late in the afternoon—stepping cat-like, noiseless, as if not thoroughly sure that

he was alone, and under fear that he might be observed.

Beaching the second story of the house—which had only the two floors—he entered one of the four rooms that surrounded him.

It was fitted up after the manner of an office library.

In one corner was an enormous desk, with glass doors incasing a number of books; and he nodded and smiled as he went up to this.

Opening the desk, he seated himself comfortably, and began to examine its contents.

"Ah!—letters. Letters and bills. Ho!—and deeds. Here are deeds—I shall keep them. Wilbur Kearn must have had a lively correspondence at one time—if I may judge by these, these—um! the deeds"—thrusting several of the documents into a side-pocket.

"They may be of some account in the future. Eh?—now then, here's—a—aha! his will! What luck! I have it: 'Last Will and Testament of—' Yes, and so forth. Good! What's this? Oh! let me look at this, now."

Accompanying the will, which he appropriated, was a thin, narrowly-folded, oiled paper. Onnorann perused its lines, reading aloud.

It was addressed, in private, to Zella Kearn. Ignoring much of it, he only paid close attention to the following portion of its contents:

"* * * At a height of five feet, on the wall, you will notice a HEART. Press the point of this, at the bottom, and it will revolve open. Insert a finger to the left of the indenture that will then be revealed, and you will touch a sort of knob—quite small—which is a bolt. Push this bolt down; then pull, with the hand retaining its position. There may be some difficulty, as the cracks are plastered over. But pull with strength, and persevere—"

"Persevere!" repeated he; "that's a good word."

And resuming:

"You will find, beyond the wall, two bags which hold, in coin, four thousand dollars each—"

"O-ho! four thousand dollars each!" he exclaimed; and concluding his perusal:

"With this, and the provision of my will, you—"

He did not read further, but refolded the MS. and put it also in his pocket.

"Ha! this is best of all! Eight thousand dollars, eh? O-ho! an egg of gold in a nest of secrets. It's mine, just as sure as skulls are ugly! I feel it in my fingers already! It tickles—it shines—it jingles—so smooth—bright—ha! ha! ha! Now, what more in this wonderful desk?"

And, after looking in vain for something else of importance:

"So—that's all, I guess. Enough! There goes the sun, behind the trees—it is night. Zounds! I am hungry. Let me see if Wilbur Kearn keeps a meal in his larder for unexpected visitors."

Chuckling over his discoveries, he restored things to rights, and then went in search of something to eat.

He was soon regaling himself with a variety of cold tid-bits, washed down by a bottle or two of excellent porter.

When he had finished, he took up the lamp and returned to the second story, where he began his search for the money.

Having found the heart, as we have seen, he applied a finger to its point, at the bottom. It turned.

He followed the instructions; and in a few seconds he had forced open a square of about eighteen inches in the wall.

Sure enough, there were the bags!

Drawing these forth, he reclosed the secret receptacle, and hastened down-stairs.

Going out at the front door, he deposited the ill-gotten treasure behind a bush—just as the sound of a rapidly approaching vehicle struck his ears; and:

"I thought it—ah!" fell from his lips.

When the cab halted at the end of the path which led from the lane up to the house, Onnorann was there to receive the shadowy, trembling form that alighted.

"Miss Kearn," he said, fearing she might not recognize him in the pervading gloom.

"Oh, Doctor!" she moaned—and could say

no more, as a great sob rose within her and checked further utterance.

Onnorann, while he extended the support of his arm to Zella, addressed the driver:

"Remain here, please; I want you to take me back with you. I will be ready shortly—and it'll give your horses a rest."

"All right, sir."

The physician moved toward the house—Zella leaning heavily on his arm. And he could feel her quivering as she stepped along in silence, with her head bowed, and an occasional sob bursting from her lips.

"My dear, be strong. Try to be calm. 'All in a lifetime,' you know. You have my deepest sympathies—ahem! but—now, nerve yourself—be strong!"

"Oh, Doctor! is papa dead? Tell me—isn't this some false, some cruel dream?"

Entering the room where Kearn lay, he gently displaced her hand, and, pointing ahead, said:

"There—he—is."

He was an apt hypocrite. While his evil mind was full of designs against this fair, pure girl, who was weighed down by such suffering, his oily manner was calculated to soothe, and his voice was emotional with seeming sympathy. Zella advanced unsteadily, to look down upon the cold, lifeless face of him who had loved and cared for her so long; and her every nerve vibrated in the misery of the moment.

"Papa!—oh, papa!"—and, with a groan that would have melted any heart but Onnorann's, the nearly crazed girl sunk down unconscious beside the corpse.

The physician sprang forward, quickly, to raise her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SET A THIEF TO CATCH A THIEF.

"But more, far more must yet be done."

—SCOTT.

"Deeper, deeper let us toil."

—MONTGOMERY.

JIMMY JIGGERS looked blank, when Dan grumbled out:

"I don't see nothin', bob-head. Guess you've kinder made a mistake."

"It's in there," he said, as if he did not hear, or would not understand the other's words.

"Nary time. Clean as a plank."

"No!"

Jiggers stooped forward to glance into the cavity, and then he, too, vented an exclamation:

"My!"

"Satisfied?"

The giant contemplated him indefinitely.

"Sh!" admonished Jimmy. "Oh, he's taken it away from here."

"Looks mighty like it," commented Dan, with a dry accent; and he asked:

"Maybe you on'y dreamt it, eh?"

"No—I saw it. I read it. It was here."

"Kinder gone, now, though."

"Wait! we may get it yet."

"How?"

Jiggers went to the large, square desk, and, by means of springs, swung open the whole front, revealing an interior of deep pigeon-holes.

At the back of each pigeon-hole was a tiny drawer, locked. There was no way to get at them, apparently, unless possessing a key, and by inserting the arm into the hole—except to demolish the whole affair.

"See: Doctor Onnorann don't know that I found this out! The will's in there, if anywhere. But we can't get in, because we've got no key."

"Sure 'at the will's in there?" interrogated the giant, gazing studiously at the contrivance.

"Yes; it must be."

"An' you ain't got no key?"

"No."

"Well, you jest watch me, bob-head, an' I'll show you somethin'. I've got a key 'at'll bu'st open the whole darn thing."

"You aren't going to mash it up!" exclaimed Jimmy, in perturbation; "why, he'd kill me when he found it out—I vow he would!—for he'd swear that I did it!"

"Jest you watch."

Dan went to the back of the desk.

He drew back his foot, and sent the heel of his enormous boot into the wood with a thudding crash.

Next he grasped the aperture in his fingers of iron and ripped open a space sufficient to admit his arm.

"How's that, bob-head?"

"My! Suppose the Doctor should come in!"

"Well, ef he did, I'd be mighty ap' to choke 'im, that's all. Jest come an' look over all these 'ere papers—I've got to 'em."

Jiggers hastened to draw out several documents.

They were lucky in finding what they wanted at the first attempt.

"Here it is! Here it is!" he cried.

"Got the articles?"

"Yes, and—oh, look here! Here's both!"

"Both?"

"The genuine will, and the forged will—both!"

"Sol!"

Jimmy Jiggers was generally too serious to smile; but he laughed aloud in glee when he discovered that he held both the genuine and the forged wills.

"An' I know where Cal Mandor's heirs are, too!" chuckled Dan, after they had carefully read over the wills. "You jest stick to me, bob-head; there's a heap o' good luck in this for me—an' for you, too."

The giant soon left the house, taking the valuable documents with him.

But before he went, he and Jiggers entered into a plan to overwhelm Theophilus Onnorann—which plan will be developed shortly.

When alone, Jiggers danced and skipped about the office.

"Oho! oho! I'm Jiggers, the drunkard, eh?—Jiggers, the sot! A fool!—and a dog!—and a football! Oho! he! he! we'll see!—we'll see! So, so, my good master Doctor—no more torment for your slave, Jimmy Jiggers! We'll put you to flight! I see you running now, at full speed—with your hair on end! We'll tie a tin pan to your leg, and set the hounds after you! You'll squeal! and you'll shout, 'Mercy! mercy!'—he! he! And your friend, the devil, will catch you at last. Oho! ho-ho!"

He produced the liquor flask from his pocket.

But he paused, with the nozzle of the bottle within an inch of his lips, and lowered it slowly, while a strange look settled in his ugly face.

"No, I'll not drink!" he whispered, a little huskily. "I mustn't do it! He might find out what I've done, and then, while I was drunk and helpless, he'd kill me! No, I'll keep sober—I'll keep sober."

Taking a large canvas map from the wall, he hung it over the back of the desk, to hide what Dan Cassar had done with his boot-heel.

Then he seated himself to finish the writing which so many events had delayed, and to calm himself for a meeting with his exacting employer.

Let us follow Big Dan.

He had not taken a dozen steps after leaving Onnorann's office, before he encountered two men, who halted directly in front of him.

And these were Percy and Neol.

The meeting was an accidental one, for the first cried:

"Ho! Dan Cassar, by the soul of luck!"

"We've had a long hunt for you," said Neol; and Percy added:

"Yes, by all that's tiresome! we've beat back and forth, up and down, through and through, till our backs are humped with aching! Where have you hid yourself?—in some chimney-top? We went to the 'den'; but—may Satan anoint it!—it's chock-full of police."

"An' what in thunder's the matter? What've you been a-racin' after me for? I don't owe you nothin'."

"Well, it's just this: Queen Ruby's dis-banded."

"Disbanded!"

"Broke up."

"Broke up?"

"Left us," inserted Neol.

"Left you?"

The giant gazed inquiringly into the bearded visages.

"Yes, she's cut loose, and give us a big 'share.' We're never to recognize her, by word nor look. And she wants to see you to-night—to get rid of you, too, I'll wager—eh, Neol?"

"Yes, that's it."

Big Dan was somewhat puzzled, until he learned what had transpired on the night previous, at the house of Ilde Wyn.

"She wants to see you to-night," Percy impressed upon him.

"I'll be there."

Nine o'clock in the evening.

Cassar had been loitering in the vicinity of his "den" to see if there would occur any chance for him to remove the treasure which he had stowed away in the cellar.

Shortly after sundown, the house (which had been in the possession of a police force all day, and which was examined by the authorities, without any suspicious discoveries being made) was closed; and Dan heard one of the officers remark, as two of them passed very near him:

"We'll look into the thing more closely in the morning. There must be a cellar to the place, and we haven't found any way to get to it."

"Yes," thought the unsuspected listener, "an' I'll have my traps well out the way, before you find that 'ere cellar—blast you!"

He then started for the residence of Ilde Wyn.

Ilde Wyn and Queen Ruby had been as separate each as if they were two distinct persons—the associations of one being kept studiously from the other, according to the position for the moment occupied by her who played the two parts.

Dan had never been nearer the handsome edifice than to pass before it on the opposite side of the street.

Ring the bell, he asked to see her.

"Who shall I say?" inquired the servant, regarding the rough-looking visitor with distrust.

"Dan'l Cassar," he answered, growlingly.

He was soon ushered, by Ilde's order, upstairs to the room where Hugh Winfield had been received.

The beauty was walking slowly to and fro when he entered—holding a small medallion picture in one hand, upon which her gaze was fastened.

She had not long since returned from her visit to Zella, at the boarding-house.

"Ah, Dan, is it you?"

"Yes, here I am," he said, in his grumbling way.

"I told Percy and Neol to send you here so night, Dan. I am perplexed. I am throuded in mystery. I would penetrate it, and perhaps I can do so with your aid. I have some questions to ask—about this medallion."

"An' I've a big secret to spit out," he returned, with a nod.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TIMELY HAND.

"I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless!"

—BARRETT.

"* * * * * Speedy death!"

The close of all my miseries, and the balm."

—MILTON.

ZELLA KEARN sat sobbing in the dimly-lighted parlor of her now lonely home.

Before her—glancing occasionally at the drooping form, and calmly toying with his gold toothpick—Theophilus Onnorann was seated.

He was speaking thus:

"Very sad, very sad, indeed. But you know, my dear, that these things have to happen. We're all but nothing—nothing, from the time we are born. We obey three masters—the animal impulse, the intellectual desire, the Supreme Infinite—all a concentration of mystery. Strange; much at variance with ordinary education, yet true, if you think deeply on it. When we lack passion, we cannot help it; when we are robbed of those things which the mind has endeared to the heart, we must strive to bear up under the loss; and when we are called away, we ought to be prepared. Ahem! Let me hope that, with your strong nature, you will be proof against too much sorrow from this shock. You have my sympathy—I offer my sincerest condolence—I mingle my grief with yours; for your father was very dear to me. Be calm; be resigned; be assured that you

have a friend in me, who will always be glad to serve you, in any way, at any time."

And when he concluded, he flattered himself that he had made a very pretty speech.

"Thank you, Doctor—thank you," sobbed Zella. "I believe you are a friend; I am very glad to think so. For I feel as if I had no one in the world to turn to, now, except you."

Her head was bowed to her hands while she spoke; she did not see the sparkle in his eyes as he eagerly caught at the words.

"I am pleased to hear you talk so," he said; adding, after a pause: "And do you think now that you could spare me? It is very necessary that I should return to the city. I will be promptly on hand to-morrow," rising at the same time.

"Yes—you might as well go, Doctor. I—I think it would be better for me to be alone."

"Try to be calm—try to be calm, my dear; I will see you to-morrow."

With this he left the house. Securing the bags of coin, which he had secreted behind the bush, he entered the cab that was awaiting him.

After he had gone, Zella threw herself on the floor, and gave way entirely to her terrible grief.

Through the whole night she lay there weeping. It did seem as though Heaven was putting her to a cruel test, for, in her extreme of misery, she would have felt relief in death.

When Doctor Theophilus Onnorann reached his office in the city, he paused short on entering, to look in surprise at James Jiggers.

That individual was sitting bolt upright in his chair at the desk, and his ogle eyes were riveted on the door that led to the adjoining apartment.

In one hand he held a half-eaten sandwich; his close-cropped hair was bristling as if in some overwhelming fright, and the pen with which he had been writing was upside down in his fingers.

"James Jiggers?"

At sound of his employer's voice, he started.

"What ails you?—idiot!" demanded Onnorann.

"There's a noise in that room," said Jiggers, whisperingly.

"A noise?"

"Yes, good master Doctor, a noise like somebody scratching and scraping—"

"Bah!"

"But it isn't 'bah,' good master Doctor," persisted Jimmy, who has fallen back into his naturally superstitious mind. "I've been hearing a noise in that room for nearly an hour. It must be the ghost of Calvert Mandor—"

"Ha! you know his name!" with a quick step forward, and a menacing look.

Jiggers rolled over the back of his chair, and jumped beyond reach.

But the physician did not follow him up. Laughing at the fellow's superstition, he proceeded to the book-shelf, and placed the bags and documents which he had brought with him in the concealment beyond.

"James Jiggers, you may retire. Tell my housekeeper, before you go up, that I do not care for anything to eat."

While Jiggers hastened from the room—glad to escape from the presence of his employer—his heart was thumping and his face was a little pale. The Doctor's remark had brought something to his memory, which, up to that moment, was forgotten.

What if he had asked, from some cause, to see his housekeeper, the mulatto girl?

Reaching the third story, he went, on tip-toe, to the slide in the door of the room that contained the mulatto and the dead quad-room.

He could see nothing, for a thick darkness prevailed; but presently he detected the sound of deep, regular respiration, and he knew she must be asleep.

"It's all right," he whispered to himself; "but my! what a narrow escape! If he had wanted to see her, the whole thing would have been out, and I'd be a dead man. If I can only keep it straight, now, until to-morrow night! Oho! to-morrow night, and that giant of a fellow will be here! Then let my good master Doctor look out! But that noise I heard in the back room?—what if

Calvert Mandor is still alive!" and, with this last idea running in his brain, he continued on to his sleeping-room.

We pass over the details of Wilbur Kearn's funeral.

Theophilus Onnorann had been very attentive on the occasion. He had defrayed all expenses; acted in a manner that caused remarks of praise from those who assembled in the sad hour; created a very deep impression in Zella's heart.

Now all was silent at the little cottage. The many neighbors who had come thither to attend the funeral, and to express their sympathies, had departed; and the physician sat alone with the orphaned girl in the darkened parlor.

"My dear, I am glad to see you bear up so nobly under your affliction."

"I suppose I must, Doctor."

Her voice was low, but it was firm; her face was very pale and weary-looking, but the eyes were bright that returned his gaze.

"Um! yes, it's always good to be philosophic. And now, my dear, we will speak of other matters quite important."

"What is it?"

"My dear," he spoke slowly, and the spectacled eyes regarded her covertly, "you are entirely alone in the world—"

"Why need you remind me of that Doctor? The knowledge to me is painful enough, without its mention by others."

"Stop, stop, now; I didn't mean to pain you. But it's necessary that I should speak plainly. Do you know whether your father made any will?"

"I do not. I hardly think he did, though—I don't know that he had anything but this cottage, and the ground around it. Yet," and her eyes fell, as she began to reflect, "I have often wondered how we lived so comfortably, when he has had no employment for years. He never told me that he owned anything."

Onnorann was laughing inwardly. The villain!

"Well, my dear, I have carefully searched all your father's papers," (which was true) "and I cannot find any will, or anything by which your future is provided for, and consequently—"

"Well?"

"You are penniless."

"Do not speak of it—"

"But I must."

"Must!"

"Now, you are very young and handsome. It is rather a sad plight to be alone and moneyless in the world—so pretty, too! You'll have to get married—eh?"

He was smiling suggestively.

Marriage? How the thought galled her bosom!

"Doctor, I beg of you, desist."

"But it is for your own interest. You must marry. Think of it!—a loving husband—comfort—luxury—money—all fine to have, you know; ahem; better than poverty, eh?"

"Let us drop this. I shall never marry."

Zella turned to the window, and, throwing open the shutters, gazed out over the familiar landscape. The action was to hide from him the emotion caused by his words.

"Never marry!" thought he. "Um! that's a damper. Let us see about it."

Zella wheeled suddenly, as she felt a set of skinny fingers grasp her hand.

The physician stood beside her, smiling as pleasantly as he could; and he said, very gently:

"My dear, I have so long been a friend to you and your father that it seems to me proper that I should be even more. I did not mention marriage without an object. I want you to be my wife."

"Your—wife!"

Zella looked at him as if she doubted her ears.

"Yes, my dear. I have a nice home to offer you—you shall have plenty of money to spend—I will be very devoted. Will you have me?"

"You jest!"

"Jest!" he exclaimed, mentally; and then: "No—I mean it."

"Why, Doctor, you are old enough to be my father!"

"All bosh, my dear!—that is no matter. Be my wife."

"Impossible!"

"Impossible?"

"Certainly!—impossible!" and she added, more seriously: "I shall never marry *anyone*, Doctor Onnorann."

"Zella Kearn"—the smile had left his face, and the hold on her wrist tightened—"if I am an old man, I can love. I am as passionate as a young man with all the budding fires in his breast! I offer you an honorable name, a comfortable home—"

"Unhand me, please," she interrupted; and then, freeing herself: "This is rather a strange time to speak upon such a subject—and to me."

"It is because I love you," persisted the oily voice, with a slight tinge of huskiness; for Onnorann's patience was being sorely tried.

For a moment Zella looked steadily at him.

"Doctor Onnorann, I never did like you—there was always something about you that made me feel afraid of you—feel as if you were a secret enemy. Since papa died, you have been very kind to me, indeed; but, if your actions were solely in consequence of a hope that I would marry you, then I am sorry—for you will be disappointed, and I regret that your motives were not more sincere. I tell you again, I shall never marry any one."

"Then you reject me?"

"Call it that if you will."

"But you must be mine, Zella Kearn!"

His eyes were burning in their gaze, and his sallow face flushed in rising anger.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, firmly.

"This:"—with a half-savage accent—"that I'll haunt you wherever you go! I see plainly that no ordinary wooing can win you. I swear, then, that I'll follow you like a shadow from place to place; I'll add to the darkness of your life at every opportunity! Such friends as you may make I'll turn against you! You shall flee like a hunted bird, until at last, worn out with the struggle, you'll—"

"Die, before I would ask mercy of you!" cried Zella, red with indignation.

The mask had fallen. She saw Theophilus Onnorann as others had seen him in times past—a bold hypocrite, a designing, unscrupulous villain; a man who would sacrifice everything—ay, perhaps, even his soul—to gain a coveted benefit.

"Go from me, Doctor Onnorann!—go! I don't want to see you again as long as I live!—you are hateful to my sight! O-h! you may threaten me—you may persecute me; but it won't be for long!—I shall soon defy you! There is a release from earthly torment within the reach of every trampled human such as I am! I do not fear your threats! Go from me, I say—go!"

Her beautiful face was scarlet in resentful passion; the bright eyes pierced to his baffled heart, and their glance was withering in its scornful flashing.

Onnorann retreated precipitately, grinding his teeth, and muttering maledictions as he went.

"I'll have her yet!" he vowed, hoarsely. "I'll tame her—the cat! She'll be glad enough to cry 'mercy' when she has felt how I can sting! You shall yet be mine, Zella Kearn!—I swear it!"

"Laudanum, miss? 'Deed I can't—I daren't."

Night had closed on the Mound City.

A drooping form stood before the counter of an apothecary's shop; a low, timid voice had asked for "laudanum."

The young man who was then in charge gazed uneasily on the pale-faced customer, while he refused, hesitating to give her the article she desired.

"Oh, please do! I—I'm suffering with the toothache—it's only that. I'm nearly crazy with it. I've been to several drug-stores, and they all refused me. It's very unkind. If you only *knew* my pain! Please let me have it—it will do no harm."

He was of a most sympathetic nature. He could not withstand her earnest pleading, when coupled with the strong assurance that no harm was intended; though he had at first regarded her suspiciously.

In a few moments she was speeding away, with a small vial tightly clasped in her trembling hand.

Now that we look closely, we see that it is Zella Kearn!

There was a wild, frightened look in the pallid features.

Entering Mrs. Diggs's boarding-house, she hastened to the room which was still hers.

Immediately she dropped to her knees, and drew the cork from the vial.

"Now! Now!" she cried, hysterically, while her whole frame quivered in excitement; "this will end it all! I don't want to live! It's wrong—I may never meet papa in Heaven; but anything—*anything*! to escape the horrible agonies of this life! O-h, Hugh!—may you be happy—now—fare-well!"

One second more, and the fatal swallow would have been taken—when a quick hand closed around her wrist, and a stern voice said:

"Foolish, foolish girl!—hold!—what would you do?"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WOMAN HERO.

"* * * * * one lightly whisper'd tone
Is far, far sweeter unto me
Than all the sounds that kiss the earth,
Or breathe along the sea."

—HOLMES.

"But now that you and I repose
On one affection's certain store,
Serener charms take place of those—
Plenty and peace, and little more."

—MILNES.

WHEN Big Dan made the remark which closed our Twenty-eighth Chapter, Ilde Wyn looked at him in surprise.

"You have a secret?"

"I *her*."

"First let me ask you something—sit down. You know, Dan, that whenever I asked you, in times past, who my father and mother were, you always answered that you did not know."

"And I spoke the truth—then."

"Ah! Then?"

He nodded.

"Perhaps," continued Ilde, "you have found out since. Now, let me tell you something," and she related what had transpired during her recent visit to Zella Kearn, concluding with:

"This name, 'Kearn,' has been before my eyes for years. But, as you always said you could not give me any information of my father and mother, I never confided the fact to you. Do you see this little medallion?"

"Yes—you had that 'ere roun' your neck when you was bro't to my shanty 'bout seventeen years ago."

"So you have told me; and you told me, when I was old enough, to take care of it myself—that you could not find out how to open it."

"Yas—I couldn't never get the darn thing open."

"But I did."

"You?"

"Yes; by a mere accident, I one day opened it. Here is what I saw—it contains the same now that it did then."

She held the open medallion-locket before him.

Dan saw in it a ringlet of hair, and a small piece of paper, with a scarce-legible name on it.

The name was:

"WILBUR KEARN."

"O-ho!" thought he; "I see how 'tis: this 'ere was worn by Kearn's wife, an' it happened to be roun' the baby's neck, when Beulah stole the baby and bro't it to me."

"You see, Dan? That name has been perplexing me for a long time—to-night more than ever since my visit to the young girl whose name it is."

"An' that 'ere gal is your ha'f-sister."

"My half-sister!"

"Heh-hm!"

Then the giant repeated the story which he had heard from the lips of the quadroon.

In a few moments she knew all.

"I didn't never try to make you b'lieve I was your father," said Dan, in conclusion, "an' I hev'n't bro't you up in a way 'at you was fitted for. But I allus did the best I c'd do for you; an' you've got a heap o' money, now."

"You were always kind to me, Dan," she returned, rather absently, for her thoughts were far away just then; and she added:

"So my true name is Olse Kearn. And this young girl, whose heart I am breaking, by taking Hugh from her, is my half-sister—of the same flesh and blood that I am."

Then a new, a strange train of reveries entered her mind. She was silent for a long time, and her companion did not interrupt her.

And the subject of that meditation was Zella.

After a moment she arose and went to one of the many raised cushions about her. Beneath the cushion was a drawer, and from the drawer she produced a small writing-desk.

"Dan"—her voice sounded very unnatural—"do you know the residence of Cyrus Winfield, Lucas Place?"

"Kinder."

"Will you deliver a note there for me?" writing rapidly while speaking.

"Yes."

When she had finished, she folded the paper, and addressed the envelope to Hugh Winfield.

"There it is—please deliver it some time in the morning, to-morrow, and I'll be very grateful. Now leave me to myself. I want to be alone."

But Dan lingered, to mention the plan he and Jiggers had entered into, for the discomfiture of the villainous physician.

He then showed Ilde the two wills which he had in his pocket.

After gaining a knowledge of Onnorann's baseness, she read over the wills.

Then, before he divined her intention, she tore the forged instrument into a hundred pieces, and scattered them at her feet.

"This one I will keep," she said, slipping the genuine will into her bosom. "You say you will face this wretch to-morrow night?"

"That 'ere's the time. Me an' my new pal's a-goin' to give 'im a regular shakin' up."

"I will accompany you. Come here for me. Hugh Winfield, too, shall see it all. Enough now. Leave me, Dan; I wish to be alone. Be sure that you deliver the note."

The giant withdrew.

Ilde walked slowly to and fro, after he had gone, and she was meditating deeply.

"Would that I had never been born!" she murmured, while her bosom heaved, and the delicate nostrils dilated with quick, short respiration. "This is a bitter, bitter change in the bright hopes I had painted. I was very happy—now I am miserable. This poor girl?—my half-sister, too! I have seen how wildly she loves Hugh—ay, even before I dreamed that she was aught to me, my heart went out in pity, and I could have wept to see her suffering so. It will be hard for me to give him up!—oh! *can* I? But I am stronger than she is; she is dying for his love, while I—is it not possible that I could survive the loss, and even joy at seeing them happy? And this in the very hour of my triumph. Oh! it is hard! After all, though, I am nobody still. I am parentless; the world will never be warm toward me—me, the slandered exile! Yes, the sacrifice shall be made, be the cost what it may. And Olse Kearn can live out the aimless, companionless life that has been Ilde Wyn's!"

The hand that stayed the would-be suicide was gentle, yet firm; the voice was kind even in its stern reproof.

With a cry Zella started to her feet, to find herself face to face with her rival, Ilde Wyn.

"You here!"

"Yes, I am here," replied Ilde (or Olse Kearn, as we shall now know her), "and it seems fortunate that I am."

"Begone! Go—leave me! Have you come to taunt me in my misery? Do you want to thrust more daggers into my poor heart? Have you no feeling?"

"Give back that bottle!"

"I will not. You would destroy yourself."

"Give it to me!"—she was worked up nearly to a pitch of frenzy. "You have no right to stay the hand of a suicide, unless you can *prove* why it would be better to live—"

"And that I can do," was the soft interruption.

"No! no! you cannot. Give it to me—let me die, and escape this horrid nightmare! Oh! you don't know what I have borne. I tell you I am crazed! There is nothing in the world for me, now. Once that world was so bright, and glad, and full of joy—oh! days of the past!—sunny, sunshiny days!—where have you gone? Now—now all is desolate! Give me that vial, I say; give it me, and let me go from here!"

"Zella, listen to me, please."

Olse advanced, and drew the bowed and weeping form caressingly to her.

Zella was sobbing violently; her whole tortured soul was pouring out in the bitter tears, and she trembled like a storm-blown leaf in the affectionate clasp of the beautiful girl.

"You have much to live for, Zella. Calm yourself and listen to me. You regard me as an enemy?—I am your friend. I am not here for any other purpose than to soothe and comfort you, in a way that will soon make you happy."

"You make me happy?—you? Oh! you mock me! You have taken Hugh from me! I am robbed of everything I loved—there is nothing left. I am only fit to die!"

"Do not talk that way, but hear: all that I have taken from you I will return. You shall have Hugh back again—"

A quick glance, a short, choking breath. A wildly hopeful look was in the sorrowful face, as it turned up to the speaker.

"Give Hugh back to me!—I dream!—no!—you didn't say that, did you?"

"Yes. Hugh may be yours, Zella."

"Mine? Oh! whoever you are, do not tell me this for the sake of giving me momentary hope! What—*what* do you mean?"

Olse drew her to a chair.

When they were seated, the beauty related the history of their lives—imbued with words of affection; and gradually, she brought to the other's face a glad, strange smile, that put away the look of despair and wrought an expression of heavenly sweetness.

Zella learned then that she was far from being alone in the world—that there was a sister to love and be loved, who would strive to dispel the clouds which had so cruelly darkened her young life.

Their dialogue was brief; yet, the balm it brought to Zella's crushed spirit was like the fall of medicine from heaven.

"Come," said Olse, when at last they arose, "we'll go now to Hugh."

"To Hugh!" How that name doubly thrilled her then!—for Olse had resigned her claim upon him.

Noble girl! She had relinquished the one great ambition of her heart, that Zella, her new-found sister, might be happy.

It was a nature of purest gold, to make this sacrifice; and in the few short moments in which the strangely-united sisters learned to dearly love each other, *one* life was made redolent with blissful anticipation.

In the room of ottomans, at Olse's home, Hugh Winfield sat in company with the giant, Dan Cassar.

He had been not a little mystified by the note, which was duly handed to him in the morning of that day, and which ran as follows:

"DEAR HUGH:—"

"Come to-night to see me. I have revelations to make, which may alter the course of our futures. Be prepared for anything that you are least likely to expect."

"ILDE."

And now he waited, wondering, for the return of his betrothed, who, Dan said, would be there soon.

According to an understanding between Olse and the giant, the latter had recited everything connected with her history and Zella's—which turned the young man's wonder to unbounded amazement, when he learned that the two girls were sisters.

Soon the door opened, and Zella and Olse stood before him.

He uttered their two names in one breath, and started up—then paused, hesitating, staring.

"Hugh, has Dan told you?" Olse went up to him, and laid a hand on his arm.

"Yes—you are sisters."

"And, Hugh," she added, while she could not conceal her emotion, "I am going to yield you to her. She loves you dearly—perhaps even more than I do. But, it must be very, very deep, if it is so. Stay! it is no time to give way to weak feeling. We have much to perform to-night; and for other reasons than that, we must be brief. I am sure that you love me, Hugh—and I know that you have loved Zella before me. But she is *dying* for your love. I can say no more, Hugh—I—there! I wish I was stronger than I am!" She would have turned from him to hide her pain.

But, he clasped both her hands, and cried, while the tears fairly flooded in his eyes.

"God bless you for this!—God bless you! One day more, and there would have been a desperate man ready to strike out his own life!"

Then his voice softened almost to a whisper; he gazed for a second on that other form, who with drooping head stood near.

"Zella!—come to me!"

"Oh, Hugh!"

At one joyous bound she was in his arms, and he drew the trembling girl to his breast.

And, between great sobs—for he could *not* force them back—he told of the terrible ordeal he had undergone—and told them, too, of its cause.

But, he could no longer endure. His father must bear the shock of financial ruin; and trust to Heaven for strength, and to his right arm in honest labor for support. *This* sooner than a sacrifice of principle, of honor, and the destruction of a pure girl's happiness.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EXEUNT.

"Who would not from life's dreary waste
Snatch when he could, with eager haste,
An interval of joy."—KIRKE WHITE.

"And soon the dreadful tale is spread,
And many a finger raised."—COOK.

"So—let him writhe! How long
Will he live thus?"—WILLIS.

A TERRIBLE scene was progressing in the office of Theophilus Onnorann.

The physician—with sleeves rolled up, eyes emitting a fiery gleam from behind the green spectacles and sallow face red in a heated flush—had James Jiggers by the collar, and held him on his knees, while he poised a glistening scalpel over his head.

Jimmy's face, white as a sheet, was a picture of veriest terror; and the countenance that glowered above him was diabolical in its fierce expression.

"Say your prayers!" hissed Onnorann.

"Oh! Oh! good Master Doctor!—d-d-don't!"

"I tell you to say your prayers!"

"Good master Doc—"

"You broke into my desk, did you? You robbed me, did you? Tell me where those papers are—quick! say your prayers before you die! I'm going to curb your curiosity and thievishness!"

"Oh, Lord!—"

"Tell me where those papers are?"

"Indeed, indeed, I haven't got them!" wailed Jiggers, shivering and shaking, and watching in terror the upraised scalpel, which threatened each moment to descend.

"Then, where are they?—you rascal!"

"I don't know, I vow!—indeed I don't!"

"You do!" Onnorann ground between his gritting teeth, while he reddened more and more, and the savage look grew darker.

"Good master Doctor!—they must have been stolen—"

"And by you!" broke in the husky, hissing voice. "*You* stole them! You shall die for it!—you rascal! I'll have your life now!"

Jiggers screamed in affright, and pleaded loud for mercy.

"Say your prayers. You've only a moment—ha! curses! Who's that?"

Rap! rap! rap! came a sharp summons at the door.

But Onnorann only grinned devilishly.

"Ha! h—a!" he laughed, with another grind of his teeth. "Let them knock till

their knuckles break! The door is locked—and before they can get you you'll be dead, James Jiggers! You'll pry into my secrets, eh?—and rob me? Now then!"

Jiggers saw that his employer's anger had rendered him partially insane.

"H-e-l-p!" he shrieked, as the bright razored steel ascended higher, and the physician seemed to be calculating his stroke.

Whiz! fell the scalpel.

Jimmy parried the blow—then, with a superhuman effort released himself and darted across the room.

"Help! Help!" rung again from his lips.

Onnorrann muttered an oath and leaped after him.

Just then the door cracked from its hinges, and the gaunt form of Dan Cassar strode in.

The doctor wheeled savagely on him.

"Maledictions of death upon you!—who are you?" he snarled.

"I'm Dan Cassar, an' the champion of Cal Mandor! Drop that 'ere knife, you—"

"Ha!" The infuriated man launched himself upon this intruder.

But Dan caught his knife-hand in a grip of iron—then sent him reeling across the apartment.

Jiggers made a dash for the book-shelf, and his fingers were already on the papers and treasure, which his employer had secreted there the night before, when Onnorrann aimed a blow at his heart.

Jiggers dropped the articles and grappled.

No longer the servile drunkard, and strengthened by the presence of a powerful ally, he wound himself, snake-like, round his adversary, wrenched away the scalpel—then the two went to the floor, rolling over and over.

"Jest 'let up,' bob-head!" Dan jerked them apart, and held Onnorrann out at arm's length.

At that juncture, Hugh Winfield entered, and close behind him were Zella and Olse.

The cornered villain stared in astonishment on the two last comers, and his brain began to whirl.

It dawned upon him that these actors were there for a significant purpose.

He had been robbed of valuable papers—evidences of his dark plotting—he had found the body of the dead quadroon; the mulatto girl had made known to him all that happened on the day previous; and these things flashed through his mind, in connection with what he now saw, to force upon him the realization that his misdeeds were known, that retribution hovered in the atmosphere fast closing around him.

"Look a-here!" growled Dan. "You see them 'ere two gals? One's the daughter o' Wilbur Kearn, an' t'other's the daughter o' Cal Mandor!"

Scarcely had he uttered the last name, when they were startled by a cry—a quick cry, and one full of a wild joy.

The door of the adjoining apartment flew open, and Calvert Mandor bounded in among them.

"Zella! Zella! My child!—" but he paused. Which was his child?

Great as was Dan Cassar's amazement at his unexpected appearance, he promptly pointed to Zella.

In a second she was folded to her father's breast.

Then the giant, still holding Onnorrann—explained Olse's identity in a few words.

Mandor took both in his arms, while tears of joy streamed from his eyes.

"Devil Onnorrann!" he cried, "you thought me dead! Twice you have sought my life; but Heaven has been kind in preserving me for this moment of triumph. When you cast me down that treacherous pit, I did not fall, but clung to the edge as only a man can who clings for his life! While you stood in the doorway, I drew myself in between the floorings; and, by diligence—spurred and strengthened by a hope to confront you, and visit the punishments of justice on you—I managed at last to reach the spring and escape. The hour of your downfall has come—"

He was interrupted by a dire anathema from Onnorrann's lips.

The physician saw that all was lost. With one mighty effort, he broke the giant's hold on his shoulder, and dashed toward the rear apartment.

On the brink of the open hole, he paused to curse them and hurl defiance in their teeth.

Then, ere a hand could grasp him, he leaped downward.

Search was made for Theophilus Onnorrann, but he could not be found. He reached the Biddle street sewer by means of the long hole he had mentioned to Jiggers; and he either died in there, or eventually escaped, to be seen no more by those whose varied fates we have followed.

The body of the quadroon was buried by Dan Cassar's attention; and that worthy renounced his former life of evil associations, to remain with those who are now united in happiness.

Olse and Zella had found a father to love and care for them.

Though Zella soon rejoiced in a double love—for Hugh Winfield calls her "wife," and jealously guards the gem he was so near losing in the dark hours.

Olse is resigned, and her solace is the knowledge that she made a noble sacrifice and saved her sister's life. She never knew how near her past life came to being exposed to the world; for, when the detective apprised Cyrus Winfield that Ilde Wyn was, beyond doubt, a party to the robbery, Olse's checkered history was known, and the officer was dismissed, with a heavy bribe, to remain silent.

Cyrus Winfield did not sink under the pending crisis; why, the reader may easily divine.

Big Dan's vengeance accomplished, he abandoned his nefarious business, the Night-Hawks of St. Louis passing off the stage.

Let us say for Jimmy Jiggers, the eavesdropper, that he has never tasted a drop of liquor since that night; and he and Big Dan are inseparable companions.

THE END.

Detective Dixon's Dilemma.

BY ED. LIVINGSTON KEYES.

CHAPTER I.

THE REHYVILLE TRAGEDY.

Excitement and indignation reigned in the little borough of Rehyville, in Massachusetts.

The dead body of Colonel Rehy had been found that morning on the grounds of his twin brother, Judge George Rehy. A bullet hole extending through the body marked his left breast and a Derringer with an empty barrel lay by his side. The money which he had on his person had not been touched, nor were any of the articles of value which he wore disturbed.

The body was discovered early in the morning by a laboring man who had been temporarily engaged by the Judge.

After a hasty survey the coroner deemed an inquest unnecessary; he regarded it as a plain case of suicide.

But there were others who thought differently. Conspicuous among these were the dead man's brother and Mr. Austin Bloodgood, a wealthy and prominent citizen of Rehyville. The latter was outspoken in his expressions of conviction that the Colonel had been foully murdered, and that the pistol had been left and his money and valuables undisturbed simply to lead the public to conclude that the Colonel had taken his own life.

The Judge, who was keenly shocked, was quite unable to form any decided opinion. The suicide theory he regarded as preposterous, if not impossible; his brother had everything to live for, and there was nothing to cause him any anxiety or annoyance. He had lived abroad for the past three years, and had arrived at "The Elms" but two days previously, intending to make a week's visit. He was in excellent health, and had shown fine spirits when at five o'clock he lighted a cigar and strolled out across the well-kept lawn in the direction of the woodland where, beneath a mammoth elm tree, the body was found.

The Judge watched him as he walked away, and then returned to the house to complete an important paper upon which he was engaged. This was the last time the Colonel had been seen alive.

His valet failed not alone to identify the Derringer, but he insisted that the Colonel never carried a weapon. Furthermore, he stated that, before starting out, the Colonel had told him what clothes to lay out for him preparatory to dinner.

The profession of the Colonel—he was an army officer—had for many years made him almost a stranger to his native State, and since his retirement from the service much of his time had been spent in travel in foreign countries.

But, for more than three generations, his family had been prominent in Massachusetts, and his ancestors had been among the first to settle in the little hill-surrounded place, Rehyville.

As a young man he was agreeable and popular, and his position and wealth caused him to be regarded favorably by the mothers of marriageable daughters; but he never married. At one time it was thought that he might do so, but the young woman who was supposed to be the object of the Colonel's admiration was now the wife of the village pastor, and she, with the rest of his former friends and acquaintances, was sorely grieved at the late shocking tidings.

The resemblance between the Rehy brothers was so strong that at times even their own relations found it difficult to distinguish one from the other; and it was a common thing for the Judge to be addressed in the streets of different cities by old soldiers, who supposed they were speaking to their former commander.

The Colonel, also, in his travels had

frequently been approached by persons whom it was not easy to convince that he was not the Judge. They were precisely the same size, their features were cast in the same mould, and they wore their hair and whiskers in the same fashion.

A family resemblance between twins is not a rare coincidence, neither is it uncommon to meet brothers born at the same time who are strikingly dissimilar in every respect, but it is seldom that twins after reaching middle age appear the exact counterpart of one another, which was the case in this instance.

For a small place Rehyville possessed great wealth, and it was also noted for its large number of aristocratic families. The smart sets of our larger cities of to-day are not so exclusive as was the one set of Rehyville thirty years ago, at which time this story opens.

Even the Hon. Austin Bloodgood, the wealthiest man in the county and the owner of the superb estate, "The Castle," was denied admission to the select circle because one of his parents had been a shopkeeper! Like all self-made men, Mr. Bloodgood ridiculed the idea of an aristocracy in this democratic country; and again, like all self-made men who have acquired riches, and who possess ambitious daughters, he was determined to overcome all obstacles and compel recognition.

For some reason that it might have troubled him greatly to explain, Mr. Bloodgood fancied that the Rehys were a trifle more arrogant, a little more opposed to him, than others of the polite faction; and, holding this belief, he had not attempted to conceal his dislike for the family now receiving the sympathies of the entire community.

It may have been that his dislike, his detestation of the Judge was caused by the ease and frequency wherein the latter had been successful and Mr. Bloodgood had failed. The Judge had repeatedly been given different offices by large majorities over the figures that stood to Mr. Bloodgood's credit.

The latter's recent defeat for the State Senate occasioned him great mortification and not a little anger. He had unjustly and inexcusably charged the Judge with sophistry and treachery, and he had publicly stated that his successful opponent deserved horse whipping.

But Mr. Bloodgood was shrewd; he knew that at such a time it would be a ruinous policy to exhibit any feeling other than sorrow and indignation, and due credit should be given him for his diplomacy.

This was shown in his statement, many times reiterated, that the Colonel had been foully murdered.

But who in that quiet little borough could be the enemy of the brave soldier, of whom his State was justly proud? He owned no property that others wished to possess; he held no office that another was desirous to obtain; he had never cast a ballot in his life, which would seem to make political enemies impossible, and all who knew him spoke of him in the highest terms of praise.

But he was dead, and his pale, stilled lips were powerless to give the information so anxiously craved.

Local officers and detectives had visited the scene of the tragedy and had questioned the family, the servants, and the neighbors, but without success. Nothing was discovered to give them the slightest clue.

Judge Rehy had offered a reward of ten thousand dollars for any information respecting the perpetrator of the deed. He remained unshaken in the belief that his brother had been murdered.

The funeral of the dead officer was an event not to be slightly alluded to in the chronicles of Rehyville. Relatives and friends came from a distance; a company of artillery had been sent up from Boston Harbor; business was suspended in the little town, and a sorrow as sombre as a pall had settled over the community.

It was not publicly known at this time that the Colonel had left his fortune to the poor of Rehyville.

One week later a meeting was held in the town; its object was to discuss the tragedy and to raise a fund by subscription for the payment of foreign talent, if such might be prompted to undertake what appeared to be almost a hopeless task.

The name of Mr. Austin Bloodgood headed the list of subscribers, generously donating one thousand dollars. Five thousand dollars was realized that evening and more was promised. Mr. Bloodgood addressed the meeting, and after paying high tribute to the character of the deceased, expressed a hope that the guilty one might be caught.

He then made known his sincere regret that business should call him to Europe at a time he felt that his humble presence might possibly be of some service. Two days later he sailed for Liverpool.

It is doubtful if there was one other than the near relatives of the dead officer who experienced keener sorrow over the tragedy than did Mr. Dixon Holmes, and it seemed as if even they failed to take so deep an interest in unravelling the mystery as, in a modest and unpretentious way, did this young man.

Though there were many among his acquaintances who thought the lot of Dixon Holmes a happy one, yet such was not really the case. By birth and education he was fitted for the highest social circle, but his lack of funds had ever interfered with his taking his proper position socially, just as the same cause had barred his father before him.

From this it should not be inferred that a larger bank account was necessary to permit one to figure in Rehyville society, but a certain amount of money is necessary to enable one to obtain the things, and to conform to the requirements demanded by the aristocratic classes of all communities.

That his father had failed to keep in touch with the better element proved an additional stumbling block to young Holmes, and this fact occasioned him continual anxiety and distress. He was free from all bad habits and felt there was something in him, but seemed to lack the power of application.

It was not the love of society so much as it was his love for the Judge's daughter that made Mr. Holmes grieve over his impecuniosity and his inability to present the fine appearance of the gentlemen with whom Miss Rehy associated.

She was always polite and gracious to him whenever they chanced to meet, and at times he had joined her when, on rare occasions, she had walked to the village. He had also skated with her, and once, when her horse showed viciousness, he had gone to her assistance and driven her home.

But he had never called upon her, and he was so much in love that he feared to do so now, lest his fancied presumption might deprive him of the pleasant chats which he had grown to regard as quite essential to his happiness—if not to his health.

His sorrow for the dead man, whom he had known slightly, was genuine and sincere; but he was conscious of a keener pang when he remembered that the murdered man was Miss Rehy's uncle.

He happened to be one of the very first to learn of the tragedy, and was on the spot prior to the arrival of the coroner.

The opinion of this official had greatly angered him; it seemed, in a measure, an insult to the young woman in whom he was so absorbed.

It also filled him with an intense desire to fathom the mystery. Perhaps by his so doing Miss Rehy might be enabled to fathom the secret of his heart which he had kept so inviolate!

CHAPTER II.

THE DETECTIVE'S TRAIL.

Though we find Dixon Holmes at the age of twenty-three without profession

and without employment, yet it scarcely could be said that he had wasted his time or his opportunities. He had ever been a great reader, and his remarkable memory made the information thus acquired to benefit him.

Quite early in life he had shown a decided preference for history. Later on he devoted much time to the study of law. The proceedings of a great criminal trial interested and fascinated him more than might any play or opera. A new detective story by Gaborieau had the power to make him almost forget Miss Rehy for a few hours.

He was familiar with the intrigues and star-chamber proceedings that have played such prominent parts in the history of the world, especially the Old World.

Naturally bright and clever, for one so young he was an excellent judge of human character, and his modest, gentle bearing had won him many friends.

However, bright and clever as he was, he was not conscious that it was his love for Miss Rehy which prompted him to strain every nerve in his endeavor to bring the guilty one to justice, yet such was the case.

No one knew better than Dixon Holmes the many difficulties attending the task he had determined to undertake. The local officers, to a man, and many of the residents of Rehyville, had accepted the decision of the coroner as final.

Such narrow-mindedness appears to be a chronic epidemic in all small communities. The village postmaster is greater authority than the Postmaster-General, the presiding judge is a more august being than the President of the United States, and the parson, who is always recognized as intellectually superior to Saint Paul, is an idol to be worshipped.

To follow where these lead, to conform to their opinions, to obey their obstructions, and to gratify their desires is little less than the duty of the average inhabitant, even to that class found in all settlements that have gratuitously received the title of "Colonel."

The detectives from abroad, who had been attracted by the large reward, were handicapped at the start. On their arrival at Rehyville, they had interviewed the local officers, and they had become so thoroughly imbued with the belief entertained by the coroner that they were not in a condition of mind to undertake the solution of a problem, requiring time and labor, when the chance of ultimate success appeared almost hopeless.

But Dixon Holmes was not handicapped by the opinion of any one. He had felt from the very first that Colonel Rehy had been murdered, and nothing should now change his belief. In fact, it had been strengthened to a certainty by something that had entirely escaped the observation of every one save this young man.

When the coroner reached the scene of the murder Colonel Rehy was lying on his back beneath a large elm tree; this is the position he was found in by the laboring man; His hat—a stiff felt—was resting on his head, slightly tipped over his face. His arms were extended at his sides, and the light-colored sack coat that he wore was stained with the blood which had flowed from the large bullet-hole in his left breast.

The coroner simply went through the form of unbuttoning the waistcoat and verifying the location of the wound; he deemed further examination and investigation quite unnecessary. Then, publicly expressing his belief that the colonel had shot himself, he, with a large number of others, retired from the scene.

Dixon Holmes remained. The first thing that had impressed him as peculiar was the easy, natural, almost graceful position of the colonel, which did not accord with the horrified, yet pathetic expression overspreading his face. It

was the expression of blended fear and pain, seen frequently on the field of battle in the faces of soldiers who are conscious that they have received their death-wounds.

Again, it was not easy for Holmes to conceive how the colonel's stiff hat had remained on his head after the fall. It had the appearance of having been carefully placed there in the tilted position after the recumbent attitude had been assumed.

These incidents were being considered by Holmes when he was approached by the judge and asked if he would assist in carrying the body to the house.

Glad of a chance to make himself useful in this connection, and feeling that further discoveries of importance might follow, Holmes readily responded.

He made himself almost indispensable to the poor valet, who was nearly heart-broken, and to the undertaker who arrived later. He was as gentle as a woman, quick to perceive what was essential and skillful in the arrangement and execution of every detail.

When he left "The Elms" it was quite late at night, and he carried with him two articles. One was a sleeve-link bearing a monogram which he had picked up near to the spot where the colonel was found. The other was the light-colored coat, heavily dyed with the life-blood of the dead officer—the uncle of the one fair woman in the world to him!

As he made his way homeward, bearing the things which he had reason to regard as almost priceless treasures, he was conscious of a certain feeling of elation which was quite the reverse of the emotion he had experienced earlier in the day.

He had felt then that it would be a useless task for a novice like himself to attempt to solve a mystery which professionals had agreed was non-existent. He had also felt that it was presumptuous in him to fancy he might succeed.

It was this impression that made him reticent respecting his theory and his discoveries. Not until he became sure he was right, not until he possessed evidence that could not be disputed, and not until he had the guilty man so completely in his power that denial would be ludicrous, would he speak.

No; not even to Miss Rehy, should she chance to mention the subject. Upon this he was resolved.

The Rehyville "Sentinel," in the same conservative style that appears to be characteristic with most rural journals, had failed to coincide with the belief of those who thought the colonel had been murdered; it also failed to coincide with those who thought the colonel had taken his own life. At the same time it was quite willing to agree with both factions that the deceased was dead, and that the local officials had performed their duties in a commendable manner.

The Sunday following the tragedy the parson, in the same spirit exhibited by the editor, had spoken of the deplorable affair. His knowledge of the Christian character of the colonel would not permit him to entertain the theory of suicide; and his long residence in Rehyville, a place noted for the peaceful and orderly conduct of its citizens, made it impossible for him to regard the affair as an assassination. However, he was frank enough to admit that that portion of the colonel recognized as earthly had entered into nothingness.

Yes; Colonel Rehy was dead and buried. Every one had the manliness or the womanliness to confirm this statement.

The excitement attending the sad occurrence had abated, died out in fact. Other subjects furnished topics for conversation and consideration, and the community had relapsed into its normal somnolent condition.

But there was one resident of Rehyville who had not lost interest in the case. In fact, as day followed day, he appeared to be more zealous in his en-

deavor to accomplish the tedious task he had undertaken.

It has been written that there is no watch so faithful as the vigilance provoked by hate. While accepting this statement we may affirm that the unremitting attention and sentinel-like surveillance inspired by love is, if any, only a shade less vigilant.

Dixon Holmes had not allowed the tragedy nor the incidents connected with it to depart from his mind. The light-colored coat of the dead man bore mute but incontrovertible testimony that the colonel had been shot in the back at a point where it would have been impossible for him to have inflicted the wound himself.

To be sure, this was circumstantial evidence only, and it failed to give the slightest hint respecting the identity of the criminal. The sleeve-link might prove to be an important link in the chain he hoped to wind about the assassin. But at present it served as a barrier, a stumbling-block to the self-appointed detective. For the monogram on the button was known to him, and the owner of the sleeve-link was a prominent and influential citizen of Rehyville, and by no freak of fate did it seem possible that this man could have injured the colonel, for whom he had the kindest feelings.

Had the victim been another, even had it been the judge, the obstacles in Holmes' path would have been less numerous, for it was well known that the judge, like all prominent successful men, had enemies. But it was different in the case of the colonel, who had not lived in Rehyville since reaching manhood.

History and his own observation had confirmed Holmes in the belief that murder is always prompted by some motive, and he felt reasonably positive that revenge had been the motive of the assassin in this case. This fact made it doubly difficult to connect the owner of the sleeve-link with the crime; but he did not despair.

On the contrary, he became more active. He concluded he would attempt to trace the ownership of the derringer which, by the way, had not been seen since the discovery of the body; neither could it be found. He would go to Wickham, fifteen miles distant, and see if pistols of that pattern might be obtained there.

He little dreamed of the good fortune attending this resolution.

Wickham was a city of about thirty thousand inhabitants; it was a prosperous, enterprising place, and most of the banking and other business of the foremost citizens of Rehyville was done there.

Holmes' utter inexperience in the role he was enacting proved advantageous to him. No one would suspect this beardless-faced, modest young man, who, though not unsophisticated, yet bore evidence of rural habitation, was in pursuit of testimony relative to the assassination of one fellow-man, which might not improbably lead to the execution of another.

Arrived at Wickham, Holmes visited different hardware stores and gun shops, ostensibly for the purchase of a pistol. But he failed to be suited; he was unable to find a weapon of the pattern he desired.

Somewhat dejected, he was about to turn homeward, when he was attracted by a sign hanging over the door of a not imposing structure. To his surprise and also to his great satisfaction he saw two derringers among the other weapons displayed in the showcase at the window!

The sole occupant of the shop was a young man of about Holmes' age; but his flaring red necktie, and his gorgeous, though not genuine watch-chain suggested the up-to-date youth of the sportive class.

Holmes was shown a derringer, and while he was examining its mechanism

he remarked upon never having seen but one other of a similar pattern.

"Why, they're as common as mud," responded, the loquaciously inclined clerk; "we all carry 'em here. You're from the country, I guess."

Holmes, like all other residents of Rehyville, was proud of the little borough, and he did not like the insinuation conveyed in the young man's remark.

"I am from Rehyville," was the reply, and there weapons are carried by the legally appointed officers only."

"Why, I sold one of these myself to Mr. — of your town, not more than a month ago. I guess he isn't any cop."

The astonishment of Holmes was so intense that he almost dropped the pistol he was handling, for the name mentioned by the clerk was the same that appeared in monogram upon the sleeve-link!

The information he had received dazed and bewildered him, and saying that he might call again, he hastily left the store without making any purchase.

CHAPTER III.

WAS IT THE MOVE TO MAKE?

That this information might prove of great importance Holmes was quite ready to believe, but in precisely what way he was far from determining. The clerk's confession that he had sold a Derringer to the gentleman whose sleeve-link was found so close to the dead body of the colonel, where a similar and probably the identical Derringer lay, tended to support the circumstantial evidence already in his possession.

But, try as he might, Holmes could conceive no motive that might have actuated this respected citizen to commit such a heinous deed. His every action, since the tragedy, was sufficient to dispel any such fanciful supposition. But how came the sleeve-link there? If the Derringer found by the murdered man's body was the one which had been sold by the clerk to the citizen of Rehyville, how came the weapon by the dead man's side?

These were the questions so troublesome to answer that absorbed Holmes as he drove homeward. He was haunted, too, by the fear that he had erred in not taking another into his confidence; two might succeed where one might fail.

Should he consult some one older and more experienced than himself? No; the crime was too terrible to allow a breath of suspicion to point in any but the right direction, and he was fully conscious that the evidence at his command did point to one man.

Miss Ina Rehy was a beautiful, charming young woman of twenty. She had spent one winter in New York and another in Boston, and her beauty and accomplishments had occasioned favorable comment in the fashionable circles of these cities. But the old family mansion, "The Elms," occupied more than a corner of her warm heart, and here she preferred to remain the greater portion of her time.

Five years after the death of her mother, Judge Rehy had married an estimable woman who was but ten years Ina's senior. There was a congenial companionship existing between Ina and her stepmother, seldom met with in similar relationships, and her home life was in every way agreeable and pleasant.

The late tragedy had affected Ina keenly. She was fond of her soldier uncle, and his sudden deplorable end was a great shock to her. She had not expressed the impatience and indignation she felt at the incompetency and inactivity of the detectives; but she had unceasingly wished that she in some manner might be instrumental in shedding light upon the mystery enveloping her uncle's death.

She was quite unconscious that Dixon Holmes—for whom she entertained kindly feelings—had moved in the matter; and she was utterly ignorant of this young

man's feelings respecting herself. She felt grateful to Holmes for the services he had rendered at the trying time, and fully appreciated the motive which had prompted him to send a horseshoe woven of white violets for the colonel's funeral. The design of this home-made floral offering was somewhat incongruous with the occasion, but Ina had found a place for it in her chamber.

The day was bright and calm, and taking her sketch-book she called her dogs and started out into the grounds. This chanced to be the day following Holmes' return from Wickham.

Excitement over the information he had received, and perplexing theories so occupied the young man's mind that he was unable to sleep that night, and morning found him unfreshed and nervous. Feeling that a walk would be beneficial, he strolled forth in the direction of the woods where he frequently sat or wandered. Soon after entering the grounds he espied Miss Rehy seated beneath an elm tree, apparently sketching from life, a huge Newfoundland dog being her model.

"After the recent terrible tragedy I suppose you think me imprudent to be here alone," observed Ina, as Mr. Holmes approached her with hat in hand.

"You seem well protected," he answered, glancing at the dogs; "and, besides, the fiend does not live that would do you injury."

"Murderers have no respect for age, sex, or condition," was the reply; "at the same time I do not feel afraid here; but we never know at what moment some misfortune may overtake us. I suppose you have heard that Mr. Bloodgood had a slight stroke of paralysis at Paris recently? The steamer he was to return on brought the news."

But Mr. Holmes had not heard this, nor was he informed of numerous other incidents of a more agreeable character which she related. He spent a delightful half hour at her side, and as he rose to go she mentioned the subject he purposely had carefully avoided.

"Do you not think it strange," she asked, "that nothing has been discovered to point to the man who killed my uncle?"

"Do not call the assassin a MAN, Miss Rehy!" was the response. "No one worthy of the name could be guilty of such a cowardly and despicable act. Murder will not always out, notwithstanding the old saying. At the same time I have strong hopes that the perpetrator of this deed may yet be brought to justice."

"Do, do tell me if you have heard anything!" she exclaimed earnestly. "I thought every one but ourselves had lost interest in the matter."

Oh, how the young man longed to tell her how, for her sake alone, he had given so many hours to physical and mental toil in the very case in which she fancied he had lost all interest!

He could not consider himself in possession of information that might justify him in speaking yet; but the beautiful face was turned toward him with such an anxious expression of hopeful inquiry that he would have been less than human had he not answered:

"I can tell you nothing definite yet, Miss Rehy, and I beg of you not to ask me. But ever since the sad occurrence I have been more or less occupied endeavoring to find the guilty party, and I feel the discoveries I have made warrant me in saying that I am hopeful of ultimate success. I tell you this much solely from the belief that it may in a measure comfort you; and when I add that my one chance of success may be made impossible if my present avocation becomes known, I need hardly ask for your promise to regard this as confidential."

Joy is not the proper word to employ in describing the emotion which Ina experienced when she received this unexpected news, the subject was far too serious. At the same time it would have

been strange had not this intelligence provoked a feeling of keenest interest and anticipation.

Joy, however, is the proper and appropriate word to apply to the sensation Mr. Holmes experienced when he observed how much his statement had pleased her. It is doubtful if the young man might have done anything better calculated to raise him in the estimation of Miss Rehy than had this confession of the interest he had taken and the energy he had exerted in the mysterious case of her uncle.

It seemed to them both that from that instant a congeniality existed between them which before had not been suspected—at the least, by one of them; and the cordial handshake she gave him at parting impressed Holmes with the sincerity of her gratitude perhaps more than had her well-chosen words which amply repaid him for his good offices.

He went home with a light heart, feeling that if no nearer to the solution of the problem he was much nearer to the one woman whom he loved.

But, was he not nearer to the goal than he imagined? Difficult as it was to reconcile himself to the belief that a prominent citizen and neighbor was the criminal, yet the evidence he had acquired all pointed so strongly to this one man that Holmes was conscious that he did not regard him as innocent, even while loyally endeavoring to doubt his guilt.

Yet, ever and ever the troublesome question would arise: "Why should he kill the colonel?"

Day after day, and night following night, Holmes tried in vain to find an answer that to himself would be satisfactory.

While not holding the belief entertained by many that we invariably dream of the things last thought of before sleep overtakes us, it is quite frequently the case that we do dream of things that have been constantly on our minds for a time—things with which we have been engrossed, desirous to obtain or to overcome.

Holmes could recall more than one instance when he slept that he had been granted visions of this tragic scene. But HE had always been the murdered man.

In this peculiar state, which for want of better name we call dreamland, Holmes had seen himself walking by the large elm tree in the judge's grounds; then he had felt the sharp pain in his back that occasioned the fall which always awoke him.

So often had this same vision been revealed that the young amateur detective was convinced that the real murderer had concealed himself behind the tree, and that, as the colonel passed, the assassin slipped around and shot him in the back. It might easily have been accomplished this way, the trunk of the elm tree was large enough to shield several men.

If, in his dream, he might be allowed a glimpse of the assassin's features he might use the information thus obtained to some purpose; but such a possibility was too remote to contemplate.

Would it do to boldly charge the man with the crime? supporting it by reciting the finding of the sleeve-link and the confession of the gun shop clerk?

Holmes asked himself this question more than once and then in fancy tried to picture the result. No man guilty of the crime of murder would quietly submit to being privately or publicly charged with it when supported alone by circumstantial evidence that seemed weak and incompetent.

The suspected man was over six feet in height and of powerful frame. Holmes felt that if he should charge him with the crime the man would consider the matter a joke at first, and later, as he observed its serious nature, box his ears for his audacious impertinence.

But desperate measures require desperate treatment. There seemed to be

no possible way open to Holmes to obtain the information he desired save by the plain blunt question:

"Why did you kill Colonel Rehy?"

Dare he put this to the touch to win or lose all? Yes; for her sake he dare do anything, everything!

He would ask this man to his house, where he had frequently been before, ostensibly to consult him respecting a small piece of property. He would ask two other men to be present shortly before the hour appointed for the suspected criminal. These two men were not to be seen by the latter; but were to be hidden behind the portiere that separated his parlor from his dining-room. But every word spoken in the front room might easily be heard by them. Then, if, as Holmes ardently wished, the man should commit himself, these men would be important witnesses. If, on the other hand, he should become indignant at the accusation, and attempt to injure Holmes, his friends in reserve would come to his assistance.

This plan did not cause Holmes to feel any pride in its conception nor arrangement; he knew it was crude and faulty; but in the absence of a better one his impatience and anxiety influenced him to give this one a trial.

At the worst he could but fail; and in the event of his winning, the possibilities were so blissful to contemplate that the young man should be pardoned for his rashness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AMAZING TRUTH.

Mr. Austin Bloodgood had returned. No evidence of his recent illness was apparent; he seemed in perfect health and fine spirits. He greeted his friends cordially, and related many interesting incidents of his foreign trip.

He had stopped Dixon Holmes in the street and chatted familiarly with him. The latter had shown much embarrassment when Mr. Bloodgood alluded to the murder; evidently it was a matter he preferred not then to discuss, although, of course, it was the one subject uppermost in his mind.

It was with a mingled feeling of hope and fear that he dressed himself preparatory to calling upon Judge Rehy. He had concluded that the brother of the murdered man would be a proper person to witness what was about to occur in the front room of his little home.

The judge greeted him kindly, and listened attentively to his request. Holmes did not mention the character of the "discussion," as he expressed it, which was to take place. He simply told the judge that it was a subject which would interest him intensely, and detain him but a short time; that the judge might name the day and hour which would most suit his convenience.

Willing to humor him, and feeling that the affair was to be a debate between young men of the neighborhood, the judge politely accepted, and named the date.

Holmes next called upon Mr. Hepworth, the coroner, and had little difficulty in persuading this official to meet Judge Rehy, at his house, on the day mentioned.

So far he had been fortunate. How would he succeed in inducing his "Hamlet" to enter upon the scene?

This was not so difficult as it first appeared. The man had frequently visited Mrs. Holmes, the mother, and he had known Dixon since his birth.

Without intimating that the matter was of importance he would write, asking him to call at his house on Thursday at 2 o'clock. With these truthful words the note closed: "I wish to consult you on a subject that has caused me much anxiety."

To this Holmes received a prompt reply that was in every way satisfactory.

The eventful day dawned. Holmes was nervous and excited. To carry out

the programme which had been arranged required courage, firmness, self-possession, and not improbably a modicum of what may be termed justifiable prevarication. Holmes felt that he would have to impress the man with the belief that he (Holmes) was better informed respecting the murder than he really was. He fancied his method might result in developing the fact he desired.

Mr. Hepworth arrived promptly, and the judge a few moments later. Holmes told them that he had a novel entertainment in store for them. He explained that it was not to be a pantomime; at the same time he was obliged to ask them to witness it from the other side of the portiere.

He arranged comfortable seats and asked them to promise not to enter the front room unless he called upon them to do so.

Scarcely were the men seated when a loud knock at the front door announced the arrival of another. Hastily adjusting the portiere, Holmes went to the door and admitted the man to whom suspicion so strongly pointed.

Ushering his visitor into the front room, Holmes closed the door behind them, wishing from the bottom of his heart that he had never become involved in the affair. But it was too late for regrets. His whole future life seemed at stake, and he must nerve himself for the occasion.

Turning to the man who sat opposite him he said gravely, and in a voice that his own mother might have failed to recognize: "I sent for you to ask you WHY you killed Colonel Rehy?"

At this point a movement beyond the portiere startled Holmes, and he coughed nervously.

"That is too serious a subject to jest about, Dixon," was the response. "I had hoped that before this time some clew might have been discovered. But what was the subject you wished to discuss?"

"This very one," answered Holmes. "When the detectives agreed that Colonel Rehy had committed suicide, I resolved to find the murderer if possible. I have in my possession the light colored coat which the colonel wore; this garment plainly shows that he was shot in the back. I have also in my possession a sleeve-link picked up near to where the colonel's body lay. This sleeve-link bears the letters A. B. in monogram. THOSE ARE YOUR INITIALS, MR. AUSTIN BLOODGOOD! Mr. Maxwell, a clerk in a gun shop at Wickham, confessed to me that he sold you a Derringer shortly before the murder. It was a Derringer, you may remember, that was found by the colonel's side. These facts, Mr. Bloodgood, seem to justify my suspicion, and also to warrant my asking the question. But, lest you may deem this insufficient, let me tell you that you WERE SEEN standing behind the large elm tree. As Colonel Rehy passed, you WERE SEEN to slip around and shoot him in the back. You WERE SEEN rolling him over and adjusting his hat after the fatal bullet had fulfilled its mission."

Breathless silence reigned in the back room. The judge was trembling with suppressed excitement, and perspiration stood out upon his forehead. Mr. Hepworth observed the judge's agitation.

Holmes watched intently the man he had accused. He had detected an expression of surprise upon his face when he mentioned the sleeve-link; but that had vanished. There was nothing in Mr. Bloodgood's face nor attitude to indicate alarm or uneasiness. On the contrary, the smile visible upon his countenance suggested some pleasant thought. He stroked his whiskers meditatively for a while and then spoke.

"You deserve much credit, Dixon, for the steps you have taken to unravel the mystery, and the ingenuity you have displayed in arriving at conclusions. I judge this is the first time you have played detective, and I am quite sincere when I say your efforts deserve praise.

I am another who never for one moment believed Colonel Rehy shot himself, and I am as anxious as yourself to discover the criminal. You may aid greatly in this direction by mentioning the name of the individual who saw ME upon the scene."

Holmes was completely bewildered. This dispassionate reply was not what he anticipated, and he was endeavoring to find a suitable answer when Mr. Bloodgood resumed:

"I conclude that you meant I was seen by the Deity; but you are in error. I will now answer your question. I had no reason whatsoever to kill Colonel Rehy, nor did I kill him. I never owned a sleeve-link bearing my monogram. The Derringer I purchased at Wickham has never been taken from the box I brought it home in. Furthermore, I chanced to be in Boston on the day and evening of the colonel's death. His body had been discovered before I alighted from the train at Rehyville."

Poor Dixon! all his labor for nothing! All his blissful dreams of the future but air castles that were now tumbling around him, and adding to his mortification and confusion. Mr. Bloodgood was a warm-hearted man, and he sincerely sympathized with the poor fellow, who he perceived was suffering keen disappointment.

"Come, Dixon," he said, "cheer up! I'm glad you accused me, for it may open the way to further developments. I will now tell you what my observation has taught me. I trust you firmly believe me when I tell you on my honor that I am innocent of the killing of Colonel Rehy. I will tell you something more that will occasion you greater surprise. Nothing will convince me that COLONEL Rehy is dead!"

Mr. Bloodgood strongly emphasized the title when making this statement.

An exclamation of surprise, and the low murmur of voices from behind the portiere was distinctly audible to Holmes; but he was too astonished and excited to heed such matters then.

"Why, what do you mean, Mr. Bloodgood!" he exclaimed rising from his chair. "I assisted in preparing Colonel Rehy for burial."

"I do not like to contradict you, Dixon," replied the other, "but I must insist that you did not. You may, however, have assisted in preparing JUDGE Rehy for burial."

Numb with astonishment, dazed with amazement, Dixon stood spell-bound. Suddenly a loud noise, as of one falling heavily in the back room caused Dixon and Mr. Bloodgood to spring forward and part the portiere.

As they did so, they saw Mr. Hepworth endeavoring to raise Judge Rehy from the floor. Mr. Bloodgood was greatly surprised when his eyes met this tableau. He recalled the grave charge that had just been made against him, and observing the embarrassment of the coroner and Holmes he was quick to suspect the presence of Judge Rehy and Hepworth.

"It is a painful mistake, gentlemen," he said, "but I am not offended. Let me assist in loosening his collar and in placing him upon the sofa."

This was done as carefully and as quickly as willing hands could accomplish.

But in vain. The heart of the stricken man had forever ceased to beat! His face and neck, which at first had looked so red, had now assumed a purple-like hue, portraying plainly the cause of his death—apoplexy!

Mr. Bloodgood was first to speak.

"This is a deplorable and shocking affair, due, if you will permit me to say so, to an accident. I can but feel that this man's death is attributable to the shock he sustained consequent upon hearing my avowal. It further confirms my belief that we are now, for the first time, standing by the dead body of Colonel Rehy. Let me convince you of this,

and then I have a plan to suggest which may spare others much disgrace and misery. Colonel Rehy received two wounds during the Mexican War; a bullet hole in the left leg and a sabre cut in his sword arm. If the marks of these wounds are not found upon this man, I will agree that I have made a fatal mistake. Let us see."

Yes; there they were! Those scars which, when fresh and red, had brought him enviable laurels, but now, when white and old, are used as witness to bear testimony of such a different character!

"I am thoroughly perplexed; dumfounded!" exclaimed Mr. Hepworth, who, as coroner, had viewed so many dead bodies that he was quite invulnerable to the solemnity of the occasion.

"How could this man have posed as Judge Rehy with the latter's wife and daughter on hand to detect the counterfeit?"

"You forget," answered Mr. Bloodgood, "that the resemblance between the two brothers was so strong that the very persons you mention mistook them frequently. You may not know that Mrs. Rehy has for over a year been a great sufferer from spinal trouble, and never leaves her inclined couch; also, that an affection of the eyes makes it necessary to keep her room darkened the entire time. Certainly you and Dixon were sufficiently familiar with the judge, yet you were deceived."

Poor Holmes was in a state that baffles description.

What a blow to his hopes!

How different it was from what he had anticipated.

Instead of going to Miss Rehy proudly with the intelligence that he had found the assassin, she must be told by others that he was the cause of her uncle's death, who, through him also, was revealed a murderer!

It was too horrible. Tears were in his eyes; which looked wild and abnormally large; his face was ashen and he was trembling violently.

Mr. Bloodgood, observing Dixon's pitiable condition, said:

"There are few catastrophes that are not attended with unforeseen blessings. Dreadful as this seems to us, horrible as it actually is, yet it might have been worse. Think of the disgrace and the misery that would have had to be borne by Mrs. and Miss Rehy had we handed this man, their relative, over to the authorities as the murderer of their father and husband!

"It would have been our duty to have done so had not a greater and more wise judge come to our relief. The privacy surrounding us seems Providential. Nothing can now be gained by making public the facts KNOWN TO OURSELVES ALONE. To the same impartial judge, who spared us the distasteful duty, let us consign this man. By making this public we would succeed in killing that poor invalid, and completely ruining the life of the beautiful young woman whom we all reverence. It would be useless, selfish, wicked, inhuman to do so! Let us keep the secret locked in our hearts, never to be revealed until such time when we are summoned before the bar, so infinitely higher than any of this sphere, where this man is now arraigned. Let him to the end pass as JUDGE Rehy! Surely there need now be no fear of detection. It was fortunate we three were present. We may all bear witness to the stroke he sustained, and to the fact that he died without regaining consciousness."

This plan, suggested by Mr. Bloodgood, and readily accepted by the others, was not prompted by any selfish motive. There is a certain class who delight in tracing every humane, generous act to some selfish source. Persons of such calibre might doubtless find in Mr. Bloodgood's desire for secrecy a wish to extricate himself from all participation in the

affair. His dislike to Judge Rehy was well known, and to be implicated in the matter would ruin his political prospects.

But these three men were not actuated by any such contemptible motives; their one object was to lighten the burden to be borne by the two women who, unconsciously, for some weeks, had been without father and husband.

The murder, like many another one, was never explained. The colonel was buried and mourned as Judge Rehy, and no suspicions of the real facts were ever entertained, so faithfully had the three kept their compact.

A few months later Mrs. Rehy succumbed to the malady which had made the later years of her life a cycle of suffering, and Ina was left mistress of "The Elms"—an elegant and appropriate setting for so rare a jewel. But her reign as a solitary queen was of brief duration; "The Elms" soon had a master in whom the reader may recognize a quondam acquaintance—the amateur detective.

From letters, which fell into his hands later, Mr. Bloodgood discovered that Colonel Rehy had been in love with the young woman whom the judge made his second wife. Might not jealousy have been the motive?

THE END.

The Cyclone from Salt River.

By C. S. CHASE.

He was an untamed and ferocious-looking specimen of Rocky Mountain manhood, clad in a dirty red woolen shirt, greasy buckskin pantaloons from which one leg had been torn uncereemoniously off at the knee, while his long mass of grizzly, unkempt hair was partially covered with what had once been the exterior of a respectable muskrat, but which was now rent in a manner that allowed the aforesaid hair to protrude through it in all directions.

In fact, he was an exceedingly tough-looking citizen—a regular terror all within himself. Prancing into a Denver saloon he glared savagely around upon the group of quiet customers seated therein, and then proceeded to execute a war-dance in the middle of the room.

"Oh! ye sap-headed galoots!" he howled. "Step up yere till I show ye a new consterlashun o' ther heavens. Whoop! I'm ther Baldheaded Cyclone frum Salt River, I am, an' I'm hungry fer a little exercise. Just some o' you white-livered scavengers come up an' tickle ther lion's fang, ef you want some fun."

But no one present seemed inclined to accept the stranger's proposition, and, after pausing for a moment to take breath, the "Baldheaded Cyclone" went through the mazes of another Apache war-dance, ending by kicking over a few chairs and a small table that stood at one side of the room.

"Whoop! Yow-yow!" he cried. "Ef any o' you wobble-j'inted pilgrims want a leetle limberin' up o' ther system, jest waltz out yere, fer I'm a gigantic yearth-quake wi' a tin hat on."

"Looks to me more like soiled rat-skin than tin," ventured one of the crowd with a chuckle.

"Oh! yow—whoop! Wot cross-legged son o' a baboon war that as dared ter hint that this here head-kiver ar' rat-hide?" howled the giant in rage, seizing his torn head-dress and holding it out at arm's length.

"Ary galoot as dares ter say that that 'ar cap ain't ther genuine two-year ole seal, right frum ther ice-bergs o' ther Feejee Islands, I'll eat him, body an' boots."

No one apparently cared to dispute this statement, and after viewing the situation for a moment, the tough

skipped up to the bar and brought his huge fist down upon it with a resounding thump.

"Here, you!" he roared to the bar-keeper, "jest trot out yer p'isen fer this whole gang, an' no hesitatin' erbout it, either! Sneak up yere, ye faint-hearted pilgrims, an' drink ter ther eternal prosperity o' ther Baldheaded Cyclone frum Salt River."

The barkeeper reluctantly obeyed the command, and the crowd, nothing loth, ranged themselves along the bar, and at a signal from the bully, "downed" their liquid with a gulp.

Somewhat cheered by the dose of "tanglefoot" within him, the Cyclone from Salt River kicked over a table laden with bottles and glasses, and then proceeded to execute another war-dance around the wreck.

"Whoop! ye benighted pilgrims," he howled. "Follow around in my wake and gather up the fragments," and then, for the first time, spying a rather effeminate-looking man who was seated at a small table at the further end of the room, quietly eating a lunch and washing it down with a bottle of ale, the Cyclone pranced airily across the room and gave the table a smart kick.

The stranger did not change his position, but simply reached forward and grasped the edges of the table firmly, and the vigorous kick failed to have any effect thereon. With a roar of rage the bully "hauled off" to give it a second kick with his huge boot, but hesitated, as he suddenly found a pair of cocked revolvers looking into his face from across the table.

"Now, sir, you want to let up on this biz at once," uttered the little man, in a cold, even tone. "You've been whoopin' around here some little time, and, as you've tackled me for a bit of fun, I guess I can give it to you; so, first, just git down on your knees right where you are, or I'll drill a hole through you, bigger'n a rattlesnake."

The Cyclone from Salt River glared into the eyes that looked over those deadly tubes, and understood that he had run afoul of one of those individuals frequently met with upon the border—a dangerous man; and realizing that it would be death to refuse, he dropped upon his knees as requested.

"Now, then, repeat a few words after me, and mind, speak every word distinctly, so that all can hear, or out goes your light!" cried the little man, sternly.

"All right—hope ter turn inter a Digger squaw ef I don't," protested the erstwhile thirster after gore.

"I, B. H. Cyclone, coward and bum, horse-thief and gopher-eater, do, here before these gents, confess that I am a big bag of wind with a white feather hitched to it, and humbly beg you to spare my craven's life, and allow me to sneak away."

The tough groaned and wriggled, but repeated the words in the following manner:

"I, B. H. Cyclone, coward an' bum, hoss-thief an' (oh, Lordy!) gopher-eater, do, before these here galoots, cunfess thet I ar' a big bag o' wind wi' a (oh! suffrin' centipedes!) white feather hitched onter it, an' (crawlin' catamounts!) I humbly beg ye ter spar' my caravan life an' erlow me ter (oh, cracky!) sneak away," and the bully ended with a deep groan.

"Now, git up and skip!" commanded the little man, wickedly, "and tell your aunt that you had to take water from a man not half your size."

The Cyclone from Salt River arose, as meek as a lamb.

"Yas, stranger," he said, "I'll skip at onc't, but I'd like ter know w'ot yer handle sounds like."

"I'm Buckskin Sam, and I hail from Texas," replied the little man, and, as he uttered the name, the bully shot out of the door as if Satan was in hot pursuit.

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